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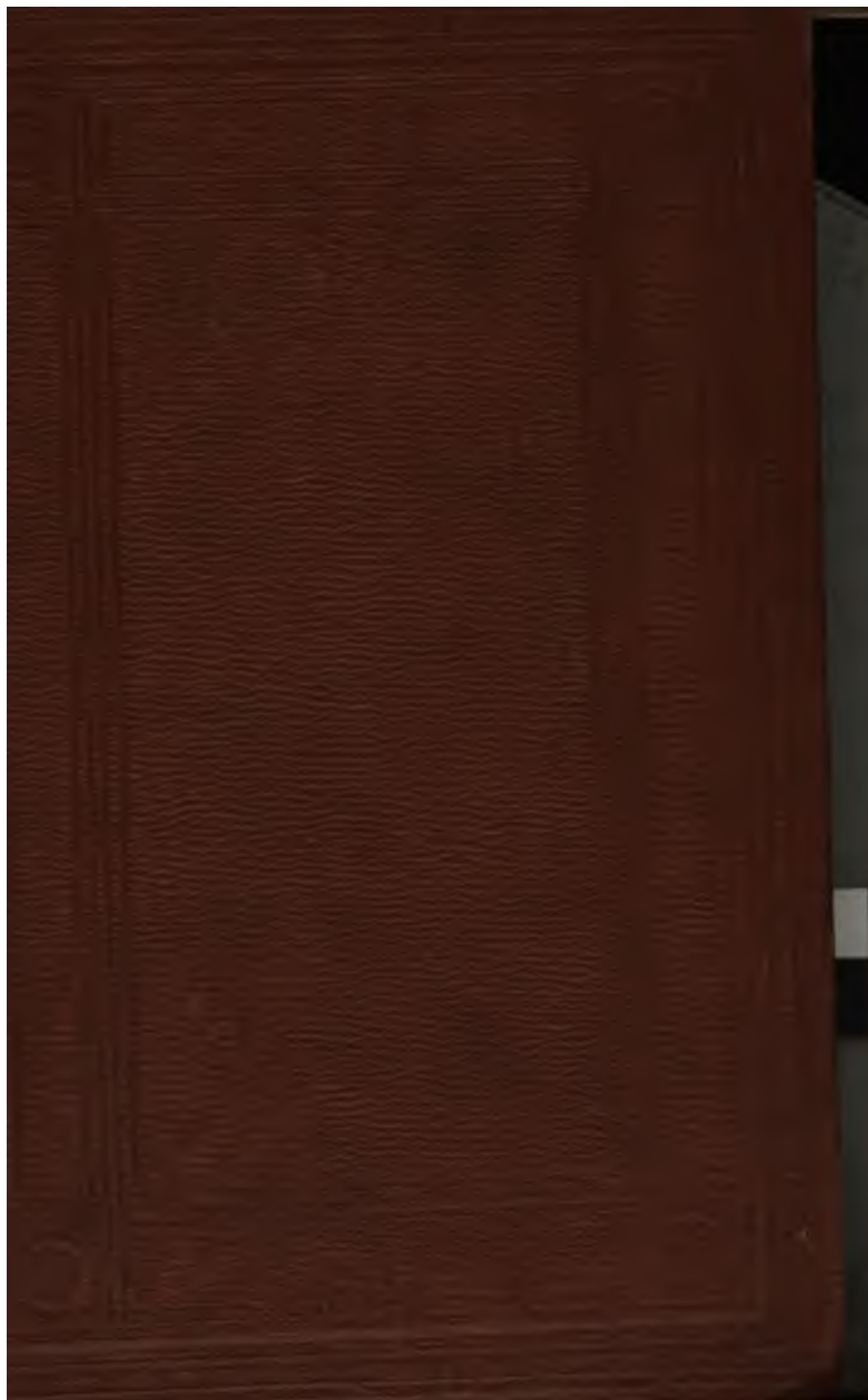
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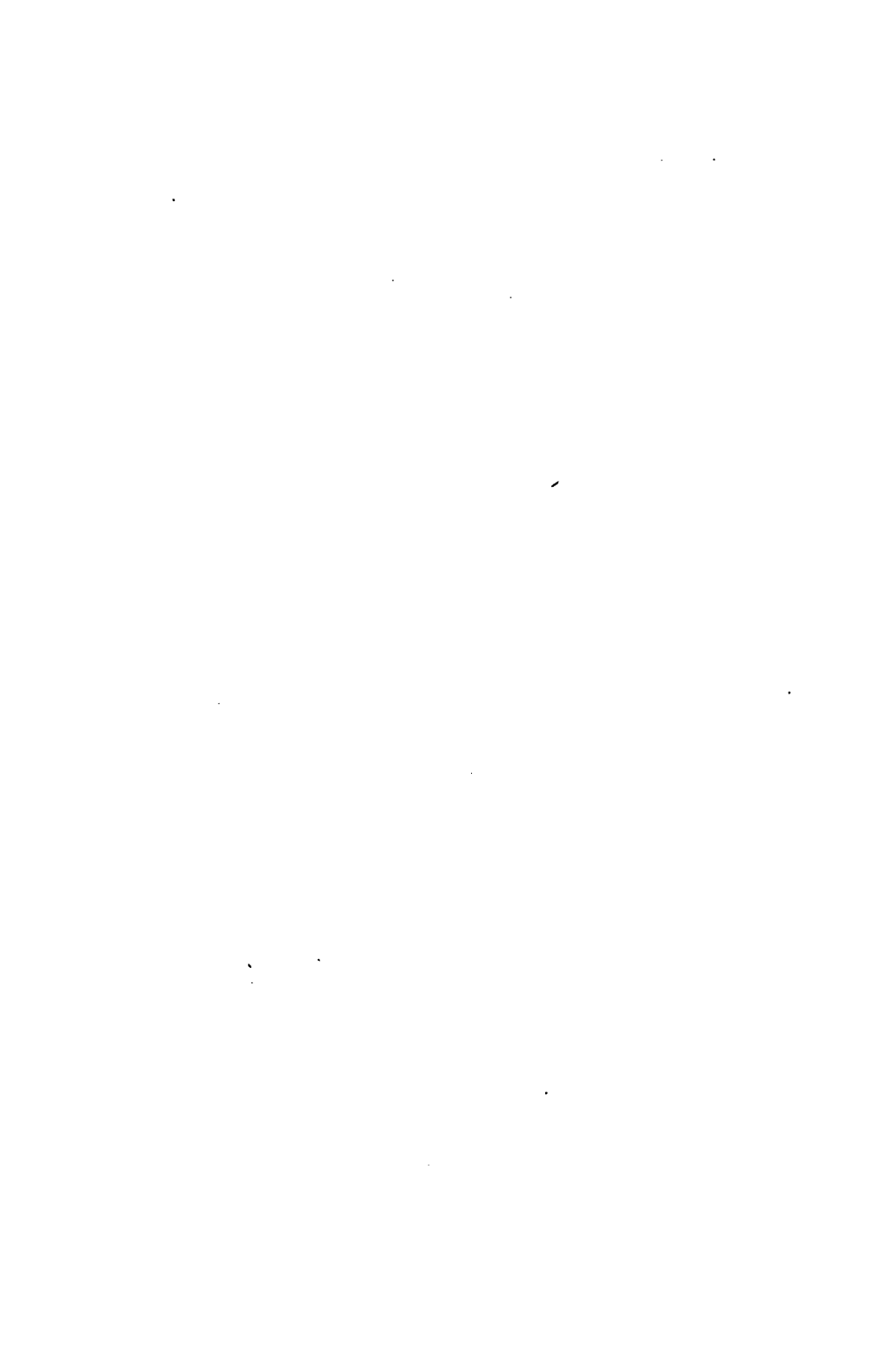
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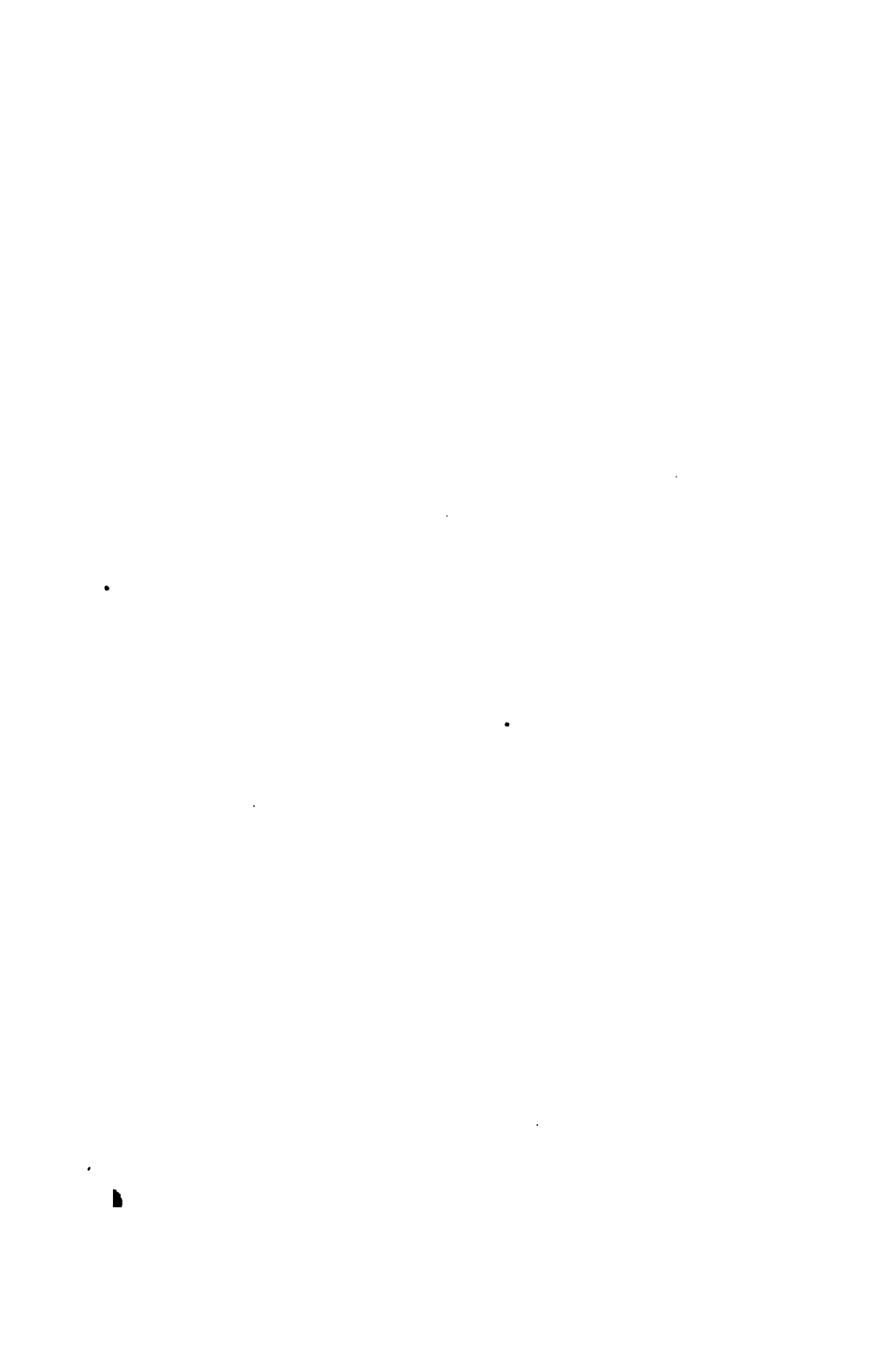


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**THE BATEMAN HOUSEHOLD.**



THE  
BATEMAN HOUSEHOLD.

BY

JAMES PAYN,

AUTHOR OF "STORIES AND SKETCHES."

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# THE BATEMAN HOUSEHOLD,

AND WHAT BECAME OF THEM.

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## CHAPTER I.

### UP THE BECK.

It is in August, and in Westmoreland, that our story opens ; and has, therefore, for Time and Place of its commencement the most charming month of the year, and the fairest county of England. The Scene is a tangled wilderness of underwood, which strives to climb a low green mountain, or 'How,' and fails before it has reached some quarter of the ascent, or so. A murmurous, sweet complaint pervades this wood, partly from its dreamy foliage, basking in the sunlight, and stirred by the summer breeze, and partly from a hundred unseen streams, which, robbed of their silvery wealth by the drought, cannot make way so swiftly as of yore down to the lake below.

The largest of these 'becks,' running through a ravine between high well-foliaged banks, is very broad and deep in the rain-time ; but the huge stones that form its bed are now bare in places, and active

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legs may leap from one to another without more than wetting shoe-leather. A pair of such are now coming up the stream, belonging to a youth of sixteen or seventeen, of so resolute and even pugnacious an appearance, that we should hardly like to provoke him by calling him Boy. He is a young gentleman not far from six feet in height; dark featured, with such eyes as take fire easily, and with a bronzed complexion, healthy as the Morn as yet, although he is already trying it by the pernicious habit of smoking. He has a handsome meerschaum in his mouth, from which issues a perfume far from divine, but which he prefers, or affects to prefer, to the natural incense which, from a thousand flowery altars, salutes him on every side. It is easy to perceive, therefore, from the first, that this young Robert Marsden is our bad character. He is, however, at all events, not deficient in courage. Although he cannot swim, there is no pool however deep—and some of them are far enough out of his depth—which can turn him; but when he comes to a place more dangerous than common, he only takes a longer time about his spring, and alights upon the stone of safety with a more determined foot. Presently, however, the stream takes a rectangular sweep through a very deep chasm indeed, and where there is only one huge boulder in the middle, with a slippery foothold at the base, and a conical top beyond it. By the look he casts upon the banks on either side, he is evidently meditating the more prudent plan of climbing one of them, and re-entering the beck above the point of danger; but

they are very high in that spot, and he is too lazy just now to use his hands, one of which is, besides, almost constantly engaged upon the meerschaum, which is long and ill adapted for violent exertion; so he settles his cap firmly upon his head, takes a long pull at the execrable tobacco, perhaps of Westmoreland growth, in order to keep it alight; sets his eye steadily upon the wet blue stone that rises above the smiling foam before him; and, once, twice, thrice—he has taken his leap as resolutely as he who rode into the gulf at Rome. He reaches his aim with his toes only; from the treacherous surface glides the too well-nailed sole, and only by throwing himself upon his knees and clutching the pinnacle, does he save himself from a very serious ducking—and alas, at what an expense? The treasured meerschaum, deprived of its guardian hand, escapes from his teeth in the struggle, and—foam of the sea though it is said to be—sinks into the boiling flood for ever. It is not for us to chronicle the soliloquy which the young man indulged in after this occurrence; enough to say, that besides the vice of smoking, he had another evil habit of indulging in bad language; in favour of which wickednesses, the only thing that is to be said is this, that one cannot well indulge in both at the same time.

Mr. Robert Marsden stood in the centre of that beautiful stream, and surrounded by the most exquisite scenery, without their charms having, for several minutes, any softening influence upon his mind; nor, even after expressing the 'cursory remarks' we have alluded to, did he recover his

former equanimity; for the rest of the way he was less careful than ever about what places he leaped at, and wetted his feet, and even his legs, with the most savage recklessness. However, he had a cigar-case in his pocket still, and he looked forward to a certain rock, which now became visible further up, as to a Mount Ararat whereon he might repose himself, and enjoy the deleterious weed, after his long pilgrimage over the waters. This rock with its surroundings would have satisfied the soul of Creswick for days; covered with heather and lichen, it lifted its lofty top far above the stream, whose tumbling falls and circling eddies it could mark down to the rectangular turn where the young man had met with his misfortune. Above this rock, the beck grew almost impregnable; a tremendous pool, with only a narrow shelving ledge around one side of it, divided it from the remainder of the stream, which soon afterwards got quit of the trees, and in time—supposing it to be going backwards—reached its mountain mother, and dark-grassed Tarn. From the rock's summit, through openings of the trees, were visible the silver sheen of the Lake, and the gray peaks of an amphitheatre of distant hills, while the blue expanse of heaven, flecked with white, overcanopied all.

Embosomed in the heather, and commanding all this scene, without being himself observed, lay a second young gentleman; he had a book in his hand, but instead of reading it, lay watching the approach of our agile friend, with a countenance unsmiling indeed, but by no means harsh or repulsive. He had

not seen him lose his pipe or heard his violent soliloquies—the roar of the beck being sufficient to drown all the bad language that our troops ever used in Flanders—but he seemed to feel that the new-comer would not be an agreeable companion, and to wish to avoid him. He once even half rose up, as if to escape into the wood, by a sort of natural causeway that joined the rock and bank, but muttering to himself: ‘Pooh, pooh; I came here first; ’tis for me to stay,’ he settled himself in his comfortable hollow again, and awaited the other. Whatever were his apprehensions, Charles Ryder had little to fear from the result of a personal contest; although not so tall as Marsden, he was at least as old as his fellow-pupil—for such was their mutual relation—and far more powerfully made; and his blue eyes, though tender, were determined, and ready enough to reflect the fire which they might themselves be slow to originate. Robert Marsden’s face grew a shade darker than common, when he saw his favourite lounging-place thus pre-occupied. Ryder looked up once from his volume with quiet undefiant eyes, and perceiving the other occupied in that intense admiration of nature peculiar to persons who are desirous of cutting their acquaintances, let them fall again upon its pages. It was evident that these young men were on the worst terms with one another; if they had been total strangers meeting upon the same lonely rock, half a mile deep in coppice, they could scarcely have done otherwise than speak to each other; whereas they were in fact dwellers in the same house, pupils of the same

private tutor, nay more—and which somewhat explains their antagonism — they were lovers of the same very pretty young woman.

There was plenty of room upon this rock for both of them. Robert Marsden might have found for himself several other heathery resting-places where he could have sat unseen to windward of his hated rival, and almost poisoned him with bad tobacco-smoke ; but he chose to clamber down instead to the very brink of the upper pool. Unless he retraced his steps down the beck, which he was too proud to do, he would have had to step over Ryder's legs to get to the bank, and therefore he made up his haughty mind to go right on ; to coast round this deep and dangerous spot, upon the shelving slippery ledge, rather than to let the enemy believe his plans were changed by this previous occupation of the territory. Just opposite to where he stood, and at the distance of some thirty feet, there leaped a lofty waterfall, churning the dark face of the pool into substantial foam, which eddied away to the sides and stuck there, or was carried out of sight by some Tartarean channel under the rock. The roar of this 'force' was deafening, and far from calculated to preserve that steadiness of hand, and foot, and eye, so essential to the passage in prospect ; the penalty for failure in which, to one who, like Marsden, could not swim, would be nothing less than death. Reckless though he was at that moment, therefore, the young man hesitated ; as he did so, a shadow fell across him and into the pool, whereby he knew that Ryder had risen to his feet, and was watching him from

behind, with most probably a sneer upon his lip. The next instant Marsden was upon the ledge, like a fly against a wall, and would have given one of his fingers—which, however, he could little spare just then, since they were all being employed, talon-wise, in clinging to the perpendicular wet bank—to have found himself safe upon the rock. Ryder, who had divined how matters stood, and only risen with the good-natured intention of departing, and relieving the other from his embarrassment, as soon as he perceived what had been done, and that for the young man to return was really impossible, threw off his coat and boots.

‘If you can’t get round, Marsden,’ cried he in a voice above the roar of the waters, ‘throw yourself off right under the fall; there are hidden rocks everywhere else.’

The face of the imperilled young man grew sterner than even his danger had made it, and his lips closed together still more firmly; he was either one who did not easily believe in the generosity of a foe, or supposed that Ryder, underrating his hazard, was laughing at him. By efforts that could not have been put forth by one less active, Marsden managed to traverse some three-quarters of the semi-circle with scarcely any assistance from his feet at all; there, however, the ledge grew even narrower than before, and his strength was evidently ebbing fast. Again, with trumpet-voice, Ryder repeated his advice, with this addition: ‘I shall be with you instantly, be sure, but do not cling to me if you can possibly help it!’ This time, the other was fairly

touched by his noble kindness. 'Thank you, Ryder; God bless you; but you would be killed yourself; I see a sharp stone beneath the water in front of you.'

'All right, Robert,' answered the other gaily; 'leave go while you have strength, if you feel you cannot hold on there.' Marsden was speechless, and growing white as the foam, when, 'Now then,' vociferated Ryder; 'once, twice, *thrice*.' A couple of splashes echoed round the pool at the same instant. Ryder rose to the surface badly bruised in the shoulder, but not incapacitated from swimming, and was horror-struck to see no trace of his unfortunate companion. Having slipped into the water, feet foremost, he could not very well have come to harm against a stone, and there were no weeds to hamper his legs. A blue cap was whirling among the eddies at the mouth of the Tartarean channel. He must therefore have been carried down into that unknown abyss beneath the rock. Without the slightest hesitation, Ryder *backed* himself into this dangerous spot, keeping his head up-stream; he was a splendid swimmer, or could never have maintained himself stationary in such a current and yet struck out his legs with the due caution: he knew well that if he should kick Robert Marsden in the face, that that companion of his early days would be a dead man. All this, which takes so long to write, was not a minute in action; at the second stroke, his leg was clutched by drowning fingers, and hampered as he was, he brought out the almost inanimate body of his friend into the light, as a

prize is towed into harbour by its triumphant but hardly less crippled victor. Then he turned round, and seized the rescued youth by the hair, who there-upon, with rare and heroic self-possession, let go his own hold. With a few steady strokes, Charles Ryder reached the other side of the so nearly fatal pool, and dragged his man to land.



## CHAPTER II.

## THE PROMISE.

WE do not know any person so endowed by nature with an aristocratic appearance that he can preserve it when dripping wet. No tailor can make garments to stand it; no hatter, hats; that 'pish-pash-posh' which one's boots give forth with every step, under those circumstances, is certainly a most inelegant sound; their limp unpolished appearance is as pitiable as, on the other hand, the gloss which water temporarily imparts to coats of broadcloth is unreal and pretentious. The two friends—for had not one saved the other's life?—were by no means the same brilliant specimens of Youth which they had appeared ten minutes before, as they now plashed homeward down a winding path that led through the coppice almost at right angles from the beck.

'Well,' exclaimed Marsden, with one of those bursts of eloquent gratitude peculiar to the young gentlemen of Britain, 'I'll be hanged if you are not a regular brick.'

'Pooh, pooh,' replied Ryder modestly, who knew exactly what was meant, and was far from criticising the extreme inaccuracy of the metaphorical allusion; 'there was no danger to *me* you know; I can swim like *anything*, I can;' and then by way of precluding further thanks, he began to whistle.

‘But I want to say a few words to you, I do indeed,’ insisted the other; and he laid his hand upon Ryder’s shoulder, as though to stop him. The young man shook it off with an expression of pain.

‘Well, if I ever make an advance to be friends again with such a sulky fellow,’ cried Marsden, mistaking the gesture, and roused by it to quite a paroxysm of passion, ‘I’d rather be drowned ten times over first. I’ll see you’——

‘No, you won’t,’ interposed Ryder quietly. ‘My shoulder is rather hurt, Robert, and that is why I shook you off; you told me of the stone yourself, so it was through my own stupidity that I came against it.’

‘What an abominable wretch I am!’ exclaimed the penitent Marsden, whose good impulses were at least as violent as his bad ones. ‘I do believe my temper will be the death of me. I shall be choked with passion some day, and only just live long enough to hear that there was nothing to be angry about after all. Why, your shoulder’s as big as your thigh; it’s bigger: you must surely have put out your arm! Here let me carry you.’

‘I have not indeed,’ replied Ryder, smiling, ‘for I swam with it since; and as for your carrying me, my dear fellow, that is the business which my legs are set to do. I may be a beast, as you sometimes affirm, but I don’t go on all-fours.’

‘You look precious faint, though, old fellow,’ insisted the other; ‘do just take a pull at this.’ As he spoke, he produced a pocket-flask half filled

with brandy; and his friend, who was in great pain, was persuaded to put his lips to it, although, as it seemed, rather to please Marsden than for any other reason. 'Is there nothing I can do for you, Ryder?' inquired the young man earnestly: you have no idea how I feel your conduct to-day.'

'I *should* like to ask one favour of you,' said the other, hesitating; 'but I daresay I shall offend you in so doing, although I am sure I am right in the matter.'

A burning flush overspread Robert Marsden's features, and he turned his face aside to break off a branch from a young tree, as he inquired laughingly: 'Well, Charley, what is it?'

'It's nothing selfish—it's nothing to benefit *me*,' said Ryder carelessly, while his companion left the branch half broken to look up at him with undisguised wonder and satisfaction; 'it is only to entreat you, as a friend, not to take up with that fellow Luders so much; you know he *is* a black-guard, and can never be made anything else of, whatever the governor may say. That's his brandy I've just swallowed, I know'—

'Ungrateful wretch!' ejaculated Marsden.

'And that meerschaum of yours, which he sold you at about twice its original price, I'll answer for it—a filthy imitation'—

'Stop!' cried the other, interrupting him with mock solemnity—'stop; and speak, I charge you, tenderly of the departed: that meerschaum lies at the bottom of Teesdale Beck, drowned and lost for ever.'

‘It would be no great pity if Bartholomew Luders lay there also,’ answered Ryder, angrily. ‘Nobody but the governor would have the charity to keep such a wretch in the house with honest women in it, and, and’——

‘And virtuous lads,’ suggested Marsden. ‘Very good, go on: I like to hear these sentiments.’

‘You have not told me, however, whether you will grant me this favour; Robert,’ continued the other seriously; ‘we are just clearing the wood, and I see the very man we speak of in the field beyond.’

‘Grant it you! I’ll grant you anything, preserver of my life, and would-be guardian of my morals,’ returned Marsden, in a tone half-bantering, half-serious. ‘Welcome the root and the spring; begone the noxious weed and the ensnaring alcohol. I embrace Ryder and virtue; avaunt Bartholomew Luders and company. And, by the bye, who *is* the company with Luders? I thought I saw the flutter of a petticoat by the rascal’s side just now!’

‘Yes, and I saw the pattern,’ observed Ryder gloomily; ‘it was red with yellow bars; that belongs to Phœbe, the miller’s daughter.’

‘Well,’ laughed Marsden, ‘for so admirably principled a young gentleman, you seem to possess a tolerably accurate acquaintance with female garments. How the deuce did you come to know that Phœbe Rosthwaite wore a red and yellow petticoat?’

‘I was in the draper’s shop at Kendal with Miss Ellen the day I drove her over in the pony carriage, and saw Phœbe choose it; her taste made us both laugh.’

‘Oh,’ replied Marsden, coldly, ‘that explains it. Now, behold this innocent man of whom we speak, and confess yourself a calumniator. He looks like the central figure in any one of those pastoral sketches upon the governor’s best china tea-service. Why has he not got a hook or a crook in his hand? He always gets everything he wants by their help, don’t he?’

Mr. Bartholomew Luders, the unconscious subject of these remarks, was lying upon the green slope of the field that skirted the wood, with a small sketch-book in his hand, to which he was, with much dexterity, transferring the scene before him. He was in reality rather older than either of the pair who now approached him, but he had the appearance of being their senior by half-a-dozen years. Dark and swarthy as a West Indian—which indeed he was—there was scarce a trace of life-colour in his cheeks; his shoulders had a slight stoop in them, begotten of a habit of continuous down-looking; and his cold eyes, which never glowed with any sentiment, had a faculty of congealing, of becoming almost like stone in their intensity of expression, when he was angered. So engrossed did he appear to be in his present occupation, that he never turned his head until Marsden leaned over his sketch-book, and mockingly addressed him with: ‘Well, Corydon, and where are your sheep?’

‘I have only two just now,’ returned Luders, looking up with a grim smile: ‘and they are both melancholy objects. They have the appearance of having been very recently dipped. Why, where

have you two been bathing with your clothes on ?’

‘ We thought we saw one ewe-lamb in your neighbourhood, too,’ observed Marsden drily.

Luder’s impressive eyes scanned searchingly both countenances of his companions before he answered: ‘ Yes, Phoebe Rosthwaite stopped here a moment, as she went by, to tell me—and I was particularly to tell you, Marsden—that she hopes to be queen of the rushbearing at Greendale.’

‘ Is this her short cut to the mill, then ? ’ inquired Ryder, sardonically. ‘ One would as soon think of going to Grasmere over Kirkstone Pass.’

‘ You ’ll go to the feast, of course ? ’ said Luders, without reply, and directing his inquiry to Marsden only; ‘ it ’ll be great fun, and we ’ll take a gig together.’

‘ We ’ll take a dog-cart rather, and then Ryder can go.’

‘ I have passed my word to the governor not to do so,’ replied Ryder quietly; ‘ and indeed, I thought we all had.’

‘ Oh, of course, if *you* say it ’s wrong, that settles it,’ sneered Luders; ‘ you fill the chair of Moral Philosophy at Teesdale How, we know.’

‘ Most gentlemen keep their words,’ observed Ryder contemptuously. ‘ Come, Marsden, we are wet through; do let us get home.’

‘ Then I ’ll order the gig,’ cried Luders, as the two turned away.

‘ Well, I don’t know,’ answered Marsden hesitatingly. Ryder gave the arm that was linked in his

a squeeze, and the young man, thus reminded of his recent promise, added briskly : 'No, not for me ; thank you. I shan't go.'

'Yes, you will, you fool,' muttered Luders, as he looked after their retreating forms ; 'but that adds another figure to the long score I have got chalked up against *you*, Master Morality.'

## CHAPTER III.

## THE BRUNETTE AND THE BLONDE.

TEESDALE HOW, which was the name of the dwelling of which these three young gentlemen were inmates, might have been built under the personal superintendence of 'the Solitary' of Mr. Wordsworth's *Excursion*. It was six miles from a market town; and the by-way that led to it out of the high road was impassable for any more ambitious conveyance than the car of the Lake District—a species of vehicle which, in a narrow road, seems to possess the faculty of becoming as compressible as gutta percha; while, in all the great expanse of mountain-ground visible from its windows, there was but a single house, and even that was an empty one, and enjoyed the reputation of being haunted. This seclusion made Teesdale How admirably adapted for study, as well as rendered it, for a yearly tenant—it was dear enough to hire for 'the season'—remarkably cheap; and both these considerations, doubtless, had their weight with Mr. Onslow Bateman, who eked out an income of £150 a year of his own, by taking £300 per annum from each of his pupils.

It would have puzzled one a good deal to give a categorical account of the qualifications which enabled this gentleman to set so high a value upon his educational services, and yet few who knew him



would be found to deny that they were worth the money. He was not a clergyman; he had never written a treatise upon the Greek Particles; he had not distinguished himself at the universities, for he had never been to either of them; he was not connected, however indirectly, with the aristocracy; and his appearance was that of an intellectual captain of dragoons. Moreover, he was a widower, with no Mrs. Onslow Bateman to superintend his household; and he possessed a couple of grown-up daughters, beautiful, and therefore dangerous for any young man of expectations to be associated with, at an age when views of 'the marriage question' are apt to be crude and unpractical, and the affections to possess an influence uncontrolled by the sense of Social Position, and what the Best Society is expecting of us.

On the other hand, Mr. Onslow Bateman was a walking encyclopædia (always elegantly bound), full of very charming illustrations upon every branch of knowledge, and furnished with a most uncommon clasp, which shut up just at the right time, and never suffered too much of the contents to escape at once. He imparted the politest facts to the rudest capacities with the air of a man acquiring information, and rubbed off so adroitly with the pumice-stone of his own perfect manners the nodosities of a clownish youth, that the rough diamond had no idea of the process, although he saw the result reflected in the eyes of his delighted friends when he returned for the holidays. The specialty of Mr. Bateman was, in fact, to impart gentlemanly behaviour, or—to

express it in a manner which he himself would have shuddered at—to make silk purses out of sows' ears. Thus it was that in those not quite exceptional cases where nature omits to dower the aristocracies of birth or wealth with her more elegant charms, this great artist undertook, upon the above terms, to supply them. By a not unusual confusion, his success in this particular department was considered to be proof of his fitness as a moral reformer also; and among those that came to his tutorial net—where all was fish—from the vexed waters of the public schools and fashionable seminaries, were found, occasionally, some very loose fish indeed. Of this class, among his present pupils, Mr. Robert Marsden was a mitigated, and Mr. Bartholomew Luders an aggravated specimen. They had both been expelled from their respective cradles of learning; the former for a persistence in pursuing his favourite pastime of card-playing, beyond its legitimate six days' limit, into the Sunday; and the latter for an act of cruel brutality to a junior, which had fairly roused the ire of a school community, commonly jealous for the privileges of its seniors, and disposed rather to permit their powers to be strained to the utmost.

Marsden was the son of an extravagant country squire of good family; Luders, of a Jamaica planter, who had purchased depreciated property, but at a very depreciated price, and had thus procured for himself riches, accompanied by the desirable right of complaining about his poverty. Charles Ryder was the younger brother of a Yorkshire baronet, with

little to be said against him, except that he was somewhat bashful and retiring in company, so as to make some people remark that it was a providential thing that he was not the eldest son, and had not succeeded to the title instead of Sir Harry, against whom those objections could not certainly with justice be urged. He *was* rather a modest and reserved person, it must be confessed—though with no constitutional want of confidence and determination—and this was especially apparent in the society of ladies, wherein he seldom opened his lips without a blush. If he had but known, as he now came across the lawn with his friend, that he was the subject of conversation between two young women sitting at one of the upper windows of the house, we are sure that, drenched and shivering as he was, there would have been quite a peony flush all over him.

‘Well,’ said Florence, who was the elder of the two Bateman girls, and the brunette—her sister being orthodoxly blonde, as the second Sister and the second Traveller, according to all novelists, is bound to be—‘Well, all I can say is this, my dear Ellen, everybody to their own taste, as the old woman observed when she kissed her cow.’

‘It is a pity, my dear Florence, that we did not begin our conversation with that sentiment,’ returned the other, laughing, ‘and save our breath to cool our porridge. Nay, if elegant saws and poetical illustrations are *all you can say* upon the matter, my love, I shall be more than a match for you.’

‘Well, my dear, as long as you will not be a

match for Robert Marsden,' responded Florence, sighing, 'you may be my everlasting conqueror, and welcome.'

'Nobody asks me, sir, she said, nobody asks me, my pretty maid,' carolled Ellen gaily, accompanying the baby-song with such a charmingly innocent expression upon her lovely face that one might have taken her up in one's arms, under the impression that she was a child out of the nursery, and kissed her; and without perhaps, even afterwards, being altogether sorry for the mistake.

'He *has* asked you,' returned Florence seriously, 'as plain as eyes can speak.'

'Madam,' observed Miss Ellen with mock solemnity, and imitating, as well as she could, the deep bass tones of Mr. Charles Ryder, while she uttered his favourite piece of slang repartee—'Madam, you are another.'

'Yes,' replied Florence, impetuously, and understanding, with womanly intuition, all that the other had meant to suggest, 'I know that Charles Ryder is not a clever man, and that he makes use of dull stereotyped school-boy vulgarisms; but I would rather a thousand times have him for my brother-in-law, for my dear, dear sister Ellen's companion for life, than a young man without religion, without principle, without self-government of any description, and who does not know his own mind for two minutes together.'

'If his mind, if Mr. Marsden's mind,' answered the younger girl, beginning to cry, 'is so peculiarly bad, it does seem exceedingly hard,' (sobbing) 'that

he shouldn't always *know* it, at least. I—I—I,' here she got rather hysterical, and could with difficulty articulate, 'I think I shall go and lie down in my own room for a little.' But Florence's arms were round her neck, and Florence's lips were pressed to hers before she could rise; and the two sisters, who dearly loved one another, forgot for a moment in that affectionate embrace that there was any such obstruction to a young woman's happiness in all the world as a young man.

'There, we won't talk about him any more, dear Nelly,' said Florence soothingly; 'will we?'

'And we won't *think* about him any more, dear Florence,' returned Ellen imploringly; 'will we?'

'Not if we can help it, we won't; not if we don't see naughty little flirtations going on, we won't—— Oh,' screamed Florence, interrupting herself, and suddenly pointing to the foot of the lawn—'oh, do look at the Pups!'

The Pups, it may be well to observe, was the abbreviated name by which the Misses Florence and Ellen Bateman were accustomed to designate their father's pupils, and the exclamation was drawn forth by the appearance of the two young gentlemen who had just come out of Teesdale Beck. 'Why, they look like a couple of water-dogs,' exclaimed the young lady, as she ran down stairs with her sister, and out on the lawn; 'they must surely both have tumbled into the lake! Don't shake yourselves, gentlemen, if you please,' continued she, in pretended alarm, 'Carlo never does; he rolls himself over in the sun until he gets dry.'

At these words the young men immediately cast themselves upon the grass, and began to revolve slowly, amid shouts of laughter from all four. At his second revolution, however, Ryder was obliged to desist on account of his hurt shoulder, and the whole story of their accident had to be detailed.

Mrs. Allwyne, the housekeeper, who was at once as wise as a physician and as skilful as a dresser, took charge of the wounded man, and carried him off to hospital.

‘I wish, Mr. Marsden,’ observed Miss Florence, ‘that you would choose some other place for your feats of derring-do than our favourite pool. If anything had happened to you, it would have entirely lost its present high character, and gone, perhaps, by the name of Dead Man’s Hole for ever afterwards. How could we ever read aloud on Prospect Rock again, with the suspicion of having a spiritual critic such as your ghost to listen to us? Or how could we enjoy our little *al fresco* luncheons there, with the knowledge that you were present, but unable to partake of them?’

‘I am sure I would have been very sorry to have spoiled the pool,’ replied Marsden penitently; ‘I would not have haunted it, indeed, unless I had been obliged. I would have gone to Ladybank House yonder, where there is a ghost already, and kept company with *him*, notwithstanding his antecedents, rather than have interfered with your pleasure.’

‘I should not have thought you were a person much influenced by people’s antecedents,’ remarked Miss Florence bitterly, who was older, by some two

or three years, than her sister, and had reached the epoch, as she imagined, when young women are permitted to be 'severe.'

'That is the second time to-day,' said Marsden, 'for I know to whom you refer, that that innocent creature, Luders, has been calumniated. Ryder had no sooner saved my life—at the very considerable risk of his own, I am bound to say, and, considering that we were not on very good terms before, it was the more magnanimous of him—than he demanded of me that I should drop Bartholomew; that I should be less intimate with that simple-minded Child of the Tropics.'

'Oh, I am so glad to hear it,' cried Ellen, clapping her hands. 'I do think he is a wicked creature; I know it was he who lamed our dear old Carlo with a stone.'

'And yet you know, Miss Ellen, your father has a high opinion of him,' said Marsden, casting his eyes to the ground, but unable to suppress a certain air of expectation for her reply.

'We know that papa never thinks ill of any one, sir, unless he is obliged,' interposed Florence angrily. 'Mr. Ryder, who sees this gentleman when he is not upon his good-behaviour, when he has not got his company-manners on, must have better opportunities of judging him than papa can have; and,' added she, with a glance of more than reproof, 'he is by no means uncharitable in his friendships either.'

'Mr. Ryder seems to be happy in possessing your very tender interest,' observed Marsden maliciously.

‘I hope so, since he certainly has it,’ replied Florence, laughing at the harmless barb; ‘and so also, believe me, has Mr. Robert Marsden. His standing out here any longer in those wet clothes will be absolutely dangerous, and I must insist upon his taking care of himself, and getting dry ones.’

‘Well,’ exclaimed Ellen pettishly, when the young man had withdrawn into the house, ‘I do think you were rather hard upon Mr. Marsden.’

‘I was not half hard enough upon him, sister,’ replied Florence, gravely. ‘Why was it you did not answer him, Ellen, when he spoke of papa? It was to you he was addressing himself.’

‘I didn’t—it wasn’t,’ stammered the blushing girl.

‘You didn’t know how to answer him, because it was not a remark which should have been addressed to you,’ said Florence decisively. ‘No person with a really good heart would ever have spoken it.’

‘Mr. Ryder likes Mr. Marsden very much,’ urged Ellen, with some petulance.

‘He does,’ said Florence; ‘but he likes him more than he respects him.’

‘Or he would never,’ continued Ellen, without noticing her sister’s interruption, ‘have been so solicitous about his giving up the society of an injurious companion.’

Florence looked searchingly into the blue eyes turned towards her, without finding anything in their liquid depths beyond the partisanship of love; then kissing her sister’s forehead, and holding her soft white hand affectionately in her own, she said; ‘Do you remember, Nelly, when we were in Sussex, and



papa was not so well off as he is now, that you had to part with your beautiful pony, Tomboy, and how it almost broke your little heart? Well, were you not very anxious, since you could not keep it yourself, that it should, at least, have a kind and humane mistress? And were you not sorry that it was sold to poor Mrs. Turnbull, because her husband was a cruel man?’

‘I was,’ said Ellen, almost in a whisper, and trembling a little, although she did not yet see what was intended.

‘So—as far as Tomboy was concerned, I mean—you would have been pleased—since she needs must have had him—if Farmer Turnbull could have been divorced from her, would you not?’

‘I suppose I should have been,’ murmured the young girl.

‘Therefore, you would have done all in your power—if the pony was to be alone considered—to have brought that result about; and for my part, I think that unselfish love ought to have been all the more acceptable to Tomboy. There’s an allegory for you, Nelly. The half-hour bell has been rung this long time, and it’s high time we were getting ready for dinner, so you may work it out while you are doing your back-hair.’

## CHAPTER IV.

## THE RUSHBEARING.

THE pretty Westmoreland custom of Rushbearing, since the picturesque has come into fashion, and the Lake District become a lounge for the "Upper Ten Thousand," is now so well known to even the Southern public as scarcely to need description. Enough to say, that this rustic ceremony was performed at Greendale, at the period we are speaking of, with particular success. The devices into which the garlands of mingled flowers and rushes were weaved, were unusually graceful; and it was hard for the Committee of Taste to perform their functions, as blossoming cross and gleaming crown were carried past them through the pretty churchyard, which was the scene of their decision. We, of course, never enjoyed the advantage of being personally present on the occasion of a Mayday or other summer feast, in the times when Merry England *was* Merry England, and Commerce—in the vulgar form of Manufactories and Hands at least—and the Radicals were not; but we cannot think their beauties could have much exceeded those of the Greendale festival. Imagine a valley, to all appearance without an inlet, surrounded by green mountains, and approached only by a single rocky wheel-road, itself seeming impracticable at any

distance, but out of whose jaws a stream of gaily dressed holiday-makers came trooping into the village; trooping too, at rarer intervals, down the fells on either hand, and from the invisible passes far away, out of their secluded villages, which, at an earlier period of the year, had each a Rushbearing of its own. A band of musicians, contributed from far and near, played enlivening airs, which the surrounding hills repeated one to another in solemn approbation, delaying upon the tunes long after they were dropped by their mortal performers; while, when there was silence, save for the cheering and the laughter, which were ceaseless, the song of the rocky stream, whose cradle was the valley, was heard repeating its own dreamy lullaby. We suppose, with humility, that the beauty of the young girls who carried the garlands was not what it used to be in those same olden times; but they were, many of them, nevertheless, undeniably pretty, or it was providentially permitted to the spectators to be satisfied with an inferior article, and to think them so.

A long thin cross of green rushes, intertwined with yellow lilies from the mill-stream that ran by her father's house, was Phœbe Rosthwaite's offering, and it was pronounced the pride of the Rushbearing, and she, by consequence, its queen. If she felt at her heart a little flutter of gratified vanity, as the simple circlet of feathery reeds was placed upon her brow; if her bosom rose and fell with a pleasant sense of superiority to her playfellows, now become her subjects for the day; if she looked round with

unaccustomed hauteur upon the swains who tendered their mock-homage to her new position,—it may perhaps be forgiven her, as being a state of things not unknown among ladies who have obtained more genuine coronets; moreover, it was the more excusable in her, inasmuch as she had all the glory to herself, and reigned without a consort. Nevertheless, the excitement and elevation which poor Phœbe certainly exhibited were remarkable, and were afterwards set down to more important causes. Her coronation having been performed, the dancing commenced, and continued until one would have thought that even Westmoreland legs must have grown weary. But, O the capacity for dancing in those north-country girls! O the never-ceasing twinkle of their ultra-Columbine feet! Dancing dervishes *do* reel and falter after a certain amount of saltatory exercise, but Phœbe reeled (and waltzed and Sir-Roger-de-Coverleyd), and never faltered; and when two young strangers (who were, however, not unknown to many present) joined the throng towards evening, she was ready to dance them down.

‘They be a pretty couple, surely,’ observed Dick Dirlton, a young dalesman, to his partner, as the queen and Mr. Robert Marsden finished a *pas de deux* of by no means drawing-room tranquillity.

‘Ay,’ answered she, with a not imperceptible toss of her head, ‘Phœbe likes the gentlefolks. When she danced with *you*, Dick (bitterly), she was not one half so lissom-like and clever.’

‘Will you dance with me, my pretty girl?’ in-

quired a hoarse voice close beside the speaker. 'It is quite clear that they make their queen here for her garland, and not for her looks, or we should have had somebody else crowned instead of you.'

The female inveigher against 'the gentlefolks' blushed as she withdrew her arm from her late partner, and dropping a curtsey to Mr. Bartholomew Luders, replied: 'Thank you, sir; I shall be very glad.'

Nevertheless, as the young gentleman's eyes unquestionably dwelt upon Phœbe rather than herself as the dance proceeded, she soon began to regret her change of swains, and to feel, if not conscience-stricken, at least disappointed.

'My friend there,' remarked her new companion, when a pause of the figure permitted him to address his somewhat less breathless partner, 'seems to be getting on with her majesty pretty fast; he has danced three times with her already, which isn't quite fair of him, is it?'

'Why should he not dance with her, if he likes, and she likes too?' inquired the young woman—Lucy Hadden—with affected carelessness.

'Oh, certainly,' rejoined Luders, 'if they both like, there can be no objection; but Mr. Marsden is rather a dangerous young man.'

'I see nothing dangerous in him,' quoth Lucy pettishly; 'and I suppose Phœbe is old enough to take care of herself, if he be.'

'Tut, tut,' replied he, contemptuously; 'why, what a young tigress! Now, what would *you* do if a young

gentleman, like me for instance, put his arm round your waist and kissed you ?'

'Do!' said she, looking up into the sombre countenance, which did not care to conceal its native air of gibing mockery; 'well, I think I'd smack his face for him; so don't try it.'

Although the young man laughed loud and boisterously at this retort, he did not remain with the dancers beyond the conclusion of that set, and his defection was of course attributed by his late partner to the force of her virtuous reproof; the circumstances of which she narrated, by way of peace-offering, to the once more accepted 'Dick,' who repeated them with triumph to those about him.

Luders himself, however, wore no very humbled look as he made his way through the throng to the wrestling ring, which was, as usual, at the back of the village inn. There the pastoral character of the scene was, it must be owned, a good deal marred by general intoxication; the landlord of the house, in addition to a small prize provided by him for the winner, was standing treat to all competitors, and dispensing gin *ad libitum*; a little watered, perhaps, from benevolent or economical motives, beforehand, but still sufficient, in connection with what had been already imbibed and paid for within doors, to make the jolly uproarious, the stolid speechless, and the quarrelsome unbearable. Michael Rosthwaite, the father of pretty Phœbe, was considerably past the zenith of his wrestling-days, and while retaining much of the vigour of the oak, had lost altogether the liveness of the sapling; but upon this occasion,

the competitors being limited to his own neighbours and acquaintances, the old man, with others of his contemporaries, was ready enough to renew the delight of his youth. Although he possessed a mill, there did not come much grist to it; and perhaps the chance of the twenty-shilling prize was an inducement to him which was worth the risk of a fall; or perhaps the gratuitous liquor, so dear to every Briton, tempted him; but, at all events, there was Michael, the noisiest in the ring, his muddled head not being improved by a couple of severe 'fellings,' and his naturally suspicious disposition being brought into excessive prominence by numerous 'nips.' He seemed inclined, when Luders first joined the company, to resent his doing so; first under the false but deeply rooted impression that that gentleman was a disguised policeman come to interfere with the proceedings; and secondly, that he was an exciseman about to make capture of the liquid under the very groundless pretext of its being above proof. After a little conversation, however, and a couple of glasses shared with the object of these hallucinations, Michael's opinions veered round with the velocity peculiar to his condition; he began to understand that Mr. Bartholomew Luders was his own offspring, or nearly so, and that everything each possessed in the world was common to both. Mr. Rosthwaite's observations were mostly husky in tone, and not very apposite in character; while his words, tumbling one over the other, like a railway train going over an embankment, were hard to catch, and when caught, had to be rearranged

before their meaning could be elicited. It was surprising to see the care with which his companion watched for these, as if they had been the most suggestive and valuable utterances; and the more so since he always replied to them in but low tones, and evidently desired no witnesses to his amiable good-nature.

‘You *are* a gentleman,’ observed Michael dogmatically, *apropos* to nothing, but with a dim sense, perhaps, and in acknowledgment of this attention; ‘some gentlemen—some I know—are *not* gentlemen; and that’s where it is.’

‘And yet,’ replied Luders, treating this lucid statement with every outward respect, ‘I don’t find I get on with people as others do; there’s’——

‘Stop,’ interrupted Michael, with ludicrous gravity, ‘stop, if you please; don’t mention those people: they are not worth mentioning, let them be who they will. Look here, sir.’ Michael patted himself on his brawny chest, and seemed to demand a tribute of admiration which the other was prompt to pay. ‘Look here, sir; what’s my name? You know Michael Rosthwaite?’ (and it was fortunate he did so, for he would not else have easily detected the name in question in the pronunciation accorded to it by its owner). ‘Let ’em come into Greendale Ring here, and ask for me; one down, t’other come on, and I shall be ready for them.’

The offer of this feasible plan for bringing Mr. Luders into popularity, seemed to strike that gentleman with mingled feelings of wonder and gratitude. ‘Thank you,’ replied he fervently; ‘I am sure you



would do anything for me, Michael; but there's that fellow Marsden—Mr. Marsden, you know,' repeated Luders, with emphasis, as his companion's face assumed an expression of total blankness, a dead-wall vacancy such as would have tempted a bill-sticker; 'Mr. Marsden that lives at the How; now the girls like him, I find, a great deal better than they do me.'

'Ah,' ejaculated the other, with somewhat unexpected frankness, 'they always likes the good-looking chaps the best. They was once,' continued the miller, with a leer that did not add to the personal beauties at which he was so delicately hinting, 'once upon a time, extremely fond of *me*. Young men will be young men you know, and young girls young girls, and there isn't any harm in that.'

'Well,' rejoined Luders, 'everybody to their taste; that is to say, with regard to this fellow Marsden, you know; but I do wonder at your daughter—— But there, that's not my business. Come, let's have another nip.'

'My daughter!' cried the old man, clutching his companion's arm so fiercely that he began to regret having introduced so excitable a subject with such abruptness; '*what's* not your business? And what do you mean about this man Marsden and my daughter? Tell me what you mean, or I'll shake it out of you!'

'Nothing at all, my good man,' replied Luders soothingly; 'just nothing at all. They're a good deal together, I hear; people will talk, you know; and it is said that they meet one another alone, but

that I don't believe, for my part. I suppose, like you, she thinks him rather good-looking. They've been dancing together yonder all the evening, but, as you were just saying, of course there isn't any harm in that.'

With a great oath, and tearing himself away from his companion's attempted hold, Michael left the wrestling-ring, and strode with rapid strides towards the dancing-field. The distance was luckily considerable, and on his way through the cool evening air, he passed his hand twice or thrice across his brow, as if to clear away the mist that hung within, not altogether without success; once he even stopped, as if to endeavour to recall some previous circumstance connected with the subject of his present wrath, but with a curse upon his own incapacity, presently resumed his road. It is probable, that if he had come from his late interview more immediately upon the scene which now presented itself, the consequences would have been much more serious. The dancing proper was over; the couples were seated in a large circle with a fiddler in the middle, playing the lively air of 'Whistle, and I'll come to you, my lad!' In their midst was Phœbe Rosthwaite, dancing by herself with a handkerchief in her hand; suddenly stopping opposite a certain young man, she cast this at his feet, whereupon he jumped up rapturously, and, kneeling with her upon 'a cushion' of turf, administered a rather prolonged salute under the very eyes of her parent.

'Phœbe,' thundered the miller, 'put on thy shawl,

and come away home. Young man,' cried he to Marsden, 'look to thyself, if thou wouldst keep a whole skin and unbroken bones.'

'Why, bless us, neighbour Rosthwaite,' cried the young girl who was Dick's partner still, and whose turn had not yet come to throw the handkerchief, 'you wouldn't break up our game, when it's only just begun, for such nonsense as this, surely. It's only the Cushion Dance, and where's the harm in that, I should like to know?'

'Come away home,' repeated the miller, 'if thou meanest to come home at all, wench.'

'My good fellow,' argued Marsden, deprecatingly, 'why should you interfere with us in this ridiculous manner?'

'Do not thou "good fellow" me,' responded Michael, savagely; 'and never let me see thee near our mill again, or it will be the worse for thee.'

'I am quite ready, father,' said pretty Phoebe, resignedly, who had already substituted her bonnet for her wreath of rushes. 'Good night, Mr. Marsden, and good night, friends. You had better make Lucy Hadden—here's the crown, Dick—queen for the rest of the evening.'

And with that she walked away with the old man, unresistingly, and with a good temper that won the praise of all beholders. Most of them knew that she led no pleasant life with drunken Michael since her mother had died, and left her in her lonely home without a female companion; and even Lucy, her rival in chief, mollified by her last bequest, ex-

pressed her indignation loudly, and her pity for poor Phœbe.

Mr. Bartholomew Luders, presently strolling into the field, as if with the intention of joining in the 'cushion-dance,' was above measure distressed at what had happened.

'Surely, Marsden, you must have been playing the fool with the girl,' said he, 'or the old fellow would never have got into such a rage.'

The half-moralising, half-rebuking tone in which he spoke roused the other's already ruffled temper.

'That's false,' replied he sharply; 'and besides,' added he, while his loud speaking attracted the notice of the people about him, 'I shall play the fool with whom I like, without asking your permission.'

'Come, old chap,' answered Luders, who had the power of affixing banderillos to the sides of angry bulls to perfection, 'you're excited just now, and don't know what you're talking of: I am sure you don't mean to quarrel. It's near ten o'clock, and we've got fourteen miles to drive; had we not better order the gig?'

'You may order the gig, and go in it too, for all I care,' rejoined the young man furiously, 'but you will certainly not get me to go with you for these three hours.'

It was four o'clock in the beautiful August morning before Robert Marsden arrived on foot at Teesdale How: he was haggard and tired, and out of temper; and instead of approaching cautiously, as a truant should have done, he let the back-gate

swing with a slam against its post. The noise seemed to shiver the calm repose of morning to fragments; and he could not forbear looking up at his tutor's open window to see whether it had disturbed him. To his great disquiet, he there encountered the eyes of Mr. Onslow Bateman; and a voice came down to him of almost feminine softness, saying: 'Why, surely, Marsden, it must be very early for you to be taking a walk?'

'Good morning, sir; I am sorry I disturbed you with the gate,' replied the young man evasively.

The interview here terminated; very luckily, as Marsden imagined, whose next proceeding was of necessity to climb several feet up a slanting water-spout, and so to obtain access through a certain passage-window into the house. But, indeed, the whole manœuvre was watched by Mr. Onslow Bateman through a chink in the window-curtain, and afforded that rigid censor of the morals of youth some minutes of unchecked and exuberant mirth.

Mr. Bartholomew Luders had reached home with greater success, as regarded secrecy, about one hour before.

## CHAPTER V.

## THE ACCUSATION.

THE whole of the Teesdale How party were seated at the breakfast-table at their usual early hour that same morning, when the servant entered with the words—so pregnant with direful meaning to every Paterfamilias—‘You are wanted, please, sir.’

‘Wanted!’ observed Mr. Onslow Bateman, when she had withdrawn. ‘Florence, why does Mrs. Allwyne suffer that girl to use such language? “Wanted,”’ continued he, buttering his toast with exceeding slowness, and addressing his pupils with such an air as Socrates might have worn when conversing with the more favoured of his disciples, ‘is an expression used with reference to the criminal classes by the police of this country. I am not aware,’ continued he, brushing an infinitesimal crumb off an irreproachable waistcoat, ‘that I have laid myself open’——

‘You are wanted immediately, if you please, sir,’ said the handmaiden, reappearing. ‘Michael Rosthwaite is here from the mill, and must, he says, see you instantly.’

‘Shall I go out, sir?’ exclaimed Ryder. ‘I have done breakfast; I daresay he is only come about the fishing.’

'Thank you, my dear sir—no,' replied Mr. Bateman decisively. 'It would ill become me, in the situation with regard to you gentlemen which I have the honour to hold, if I should set you a bad example in this matter. In after-life, as Landlords or Employers of Labour, you will do well to make a rule that your meal-times shall not be broken in upon. Be always willing to hear what your tenants or others have to communicate, but let it be at convenient seasons. Elizabeth, inform Mr. Rosthwaite that I will be with him presently; but,' he concluded, addressing the pupils with a smile, as if to mitigate the effects of the serious advice which he had been compelled by the occasion to administer, 'if he sees me during my breakfast-time, I will forgive him.'

As Mr. Onslow Bateman uttered this charitable sentiment, the maid was pushed aside with not much ceremony, and Michael Rosthwaite himself appeared in the apartment. His eyes were bloodshot, the veins on his forehead swollen, and as he stretched forth his arm to point to Marsden, it absolutely shook with passion. 'You, you,' cried he, 'it's you I want; you thief, you child-robber; give me back my daughter, or mind you—Mr. Bateman, and all of you—there will be murder done!'

'One moment, Rosthwaite,' said Mr. Bateman with dignity and tenderness. 'Elizabeth, leave the room; my dear girls, you will oblige me by retiring; there is some mistake, my poor fellow, I am sure; is it not so, Marsden?'

'Sir,' replied the young man firmly, but with a

crimson countenance, 'I give you my word of honour that I know nothing of this matter at all. The last time I saw Phœbe'—

'Phœbe!' ejaculated Mr. Bateman.

'O yes, Phœbe; that's her name,' cried Michael bitterly: 'even now that he is lying, and pretending that he knows nothing of her, he calls her Phœbe.'

'I am not lying, old man,' retorted Marsden impetuously; 'I never set eyes but three times on your daughter. Sir, I was at the Rushbearing at Greendale last night, I own, in opposition to your wishes, and I danced with Phœbe Rosthwaite until ten o'clock. She left at that hour with her father there, and of course I have never seen her since.'

'Were you all at the Rushbearing last night?' asked Mr. Bateman gravely.

'I regret to say, sir, that I *was* there,' answered Luders in a penitent tone.

'And you, Ryder?'

'No, sir; I was not.'

'Why do you suspect Mr. Marsden of this abominable conduct, Rosthwaite, more than any other?'

'Why?' cried Michael furiously; 'he knows why well enough, as you can see who look at him. I've been warned of him before. His goings-on have been the talk of the whole country-side this long time. I saw him kiss her this last evening with my own eyes. I told him if he came near to Wapshot Mill again, it would be the worse for him; and it will. He came there in the dead of night—last night; and now she is gone—the old man's voice



grew hoarse and wavering as he ended—‘ she ’s gone, she’s gone !’

‘ Luders, did you come home with Marsden from the Rushbearing ? ’ inquired Mr. Bateman.

The young gentleman addressed cast across the table an apologetic look towards his fellow-pupil, but the other replied only by a look of angry scorn. ‘ No,’ answered Luders reluctantly ; ‘ no, not exactly’——

‘ Not at all,’ cried Marsden emphatically—‘ not at all : Luders drove, and I walked.’

‘ And at what hour did you arrive at home, Luders ? ’

That astute young man regarded his tutor for a moment or two, in order, doubtless, to make his reply as accurate as calculation could make it, before he answered : ‘ Between twelve o’clock, sir, I should say, and a quarter past.’

‘ And you, Marsden,’ observed Mr. Bateman, ‘ as I saw with my own eyes, did not return till four.’

‘ That is quite true, sir,’ returned the young gentleman haughtily.

‘ Mr. Rosthwaite,’ said the tutor, ‘ may I beg of you, before proceeding further in this business, to give me a private interview for a few minutes ? ’

‘ I am not going to let that villain out of my sight,’ responded the miller with determination. ‘ I know you mean me fair, sir ; but the lad is in your keeping, and, of course, you cannot but be upon his side.’

‘ I am on no man’s side, Michael, I assure you, who runs away with an honest man’s daughter ; but

I am bound to see justice done to my pupil Marsden, you must pass your word to remain here while I am in the library with Mr. Rosthwaite. Gentlemen,' continued he, turning to the two others, 'be so good, if you have quite finished breakfast, to retire to your studies.'

A determined will, when assisted by an air of politeness, can make almost any proceeding appear a matter of course; and the miller, whom opposition alone would have stiffened into stone, and upon whom good-manners alone would have made no impression, found himself with his back turned upon his intended victim, and doing that which is abhorrent even to the best of men whose minds are set on anything—listening to reason. Nevertheless, he was conscious of being beaten for the present, and that knowledge by no means inclined him to be conciliatory.

'Michael,' observed Mr. Onslow Bateman, as soon as they were alone together, 'you are now suffering such a cruel wrong, you have had so much at stake of which you have been infamously cheated, that it is impossible you should approach this subject with the calmness necessary for its due investigation. Now, you will give me credit, I think, for some shrewdness as a man of the world—will you not?'

The miller smacked his lips, not by any means in an appreciatory manner, but rather with the intention of conveying a doubt about this postulate, and muttered something about himself, Michael Rosthwaite, having rather a reputation for shrewdness too.

‘And you *are* shrewd,’ replied Mr. Onslow Bateman smoothly; ‘you are as shrewd as any man in Westmoreland; but you have not got my experience. You were born with a silver spoon in your mouth—you were.’

Mr. Rosthwaite had never happened to have heard that proverbial expression before, and he opened his mouth to its very fullest extent, as if to convince his companion that he had not been gifted by nature with the thing imputed.

‘I mean,’ continued the tutor, ‘that you had a mill over your head which would be yours at your father’s death; that you were a sort of landed proprietor, in short.’

Nothing made poor drunken Michael so pleased as any allusion to his mill, which had, indeed, at one time been a valuable property, but which, through his own profligacy and intemperance, had become greatly depreciated in value. He almost forgot his immediate trouble in hearing what a fortunate person he had always been.

‘Now, *I* was not so lucky,’ said Mr. Bateman; ‘I had to make my own way in the world from the first; not only in England, but in almost every other country in Europe, I have had to keep my own head above water much as Carlo here’—the dog was in his usual place under the library table—‘has to do when my pupils throw him overboard into the lake, not with the measured stroke of an easy swimmer, but by paddling with his forepaws, one above the other, for the bare life. I have been a very poor man in my time, Michael, with nothing

but my brain to live by; of necessity, therefore, I have used it a good deal, and know, perhaps even better than you do, what a man's character is almost at first sight.'

Much propitiated by the confession that he, Michael, had been born a 'better' man than Mr. Onslow Bateman, of whom he knew so many persons to have a great opinion, the miller readily gave in his adhesion.

'Therefore,' continued the tutor, 'you may well imagine that when a person is beneath my own roof, and under my immediate supervision, I am not very liable to be mistaken as to *his* disposition.'

'Ah, ah, ah, ah!' replied Mr. Rosthwaite in distinct syllables, and in a tone like the bleat of a lamb in order to express contempt, for he was getting alarmed for the result to which the last observation evidently tended; 'you tutors think you know a great deal, but you know nothing at all. Why, I could tell you "goings on" of your own pupils as would make your hairs stand on end.'

A violent desire to take the miller and kick him incontinently out of the house passed momentarily over Mr. Onslow Bateman's mind, but no reflection of it was suffered to appear upon his ingenuous countenance, as he replied: 'Pooh, pooh, Michael; you little know the man you are talking to. Do you suppose I don't know about the whiskey-drinking of at least one of them up at your mill? Of your poaching with them all three upon the lake by moonlight? Of your hiring out your horse, without a

licence, to Mr. Luders, that he might ride at Ulverston races ? ’

‘ You ’re just the verra deevil ! ’ cried Michael with the most unfeigned admiration, and in the north country dialect, into which that mental emotion always drove him.

Mr. Onslow Bateman acknowledged the involuntary compliment by a courteous smile, as he proceeded : ‘ Then you do acknowledge me to be a tolerable judge of the characters of my pupils. ’

‘ You just ken everything, ’ returned the miller, whose discomfiture was so complete as to be almost collapse.

‘ Well, then, I ken *this*, ’ said Mr. Onslow Bateman decisively ; ‘ with whomsoever your daughter has run away, or whosoever knows whither she has fled, it is not my pupil, Robert Marsden. ’

‘ Not Mr. Marsden ? ’ echoed poor Michael, who had still some astonishment left for such an announcement.

‘ No, sir ; upon that I will stake the good opinion which you have been good enough to express of my penetration. ’

‘ Then who, in the name of the Enemy of Mankind, has done it ? ’ cried the miller, drumming upon the table with his fingers with the air of a man who has placed himself in a false position.

‘ *That*, Michael—you will excuse me for saying so—is a matter for careful investigation, and must not be taken up in haste or passion on any insufficient grounds. Is there any other of my pupils whom you are determined not to let out of your sight until

you have taken vengeance on him for a suspected wrong ?’

‘You must not be hard, sir, upon a man who has lost his daughter by a villain,’ returned Michael with some dignity. ‘I believe I have been wrong: no, no, sir, this has not been the work of any pupil of yours. Mr. Ryder I know little of; but Mr. Luders, I will say for him, is a kind and prudent young gentleman; and indeed he gave me a bit of advice about poor Phoebe only last evening.’

‘That was very good of him,’ remarked Mr. Onslow Bateman blandly; ‘do you happen to remember what he said?’

‘Well, he did say as he thought this young Marsden was rather too much with her—but there, I suppose, he was mistaken like myself. I will go back home, sir. My wits are none the better for the liquor I drank last evening, and with this trouble coming upon me, on a sudden, I feel quite dazed.’

Michael Rosthwaite leaned his head upon the table for a minute or two in silence, and when he looked up again, there were traces on his face of mental agony. ‘I was a bad husband, sir, and I have been a bad father—I cannot say but I have deserved even as great a blow as this—but it’s sair hard to bear, sir, it’s sair hard to bear.’

The old man felt for his hat, which he could not see for tears, and made his way, shaking and trembling, towards the door. While he had thought he had his enemy within view, his vital energy was strong enough, but now that his anger had no certain

fuel, it seemed to turn its flame upon himself, and to be withering his heart-strings. Mr. Bateman accompanied him tenderly to the yard-gate, where he shook his hand; then he turned back thoughtfully, and with no air of triumph at his diplomatic success, towards his own house.

‘Papa,’ said a gentle voice, as a hand was laid lightly but affectionately upon his arm—‘papa, what is this dreadful news about poor Phoebe Ros-thwaite?’

‘You have heard all that I know about the matter, Florence, already,’ replied her father coldly, who was not wont to be confidential, even with his daughter, and whom nothing but very peculiar circumstances would have induced to speak so frankly as he had just been doing with Michael. ‘This giddy young girl seems to have wickedly run away from her father; and the foolish, fuddled old man took it into his head that the boy Marsden was at the bottom of it.’

‘Then he is *not*?’ said Florence, with real pleasure in her somewhat melancholy eyes; ‘you are satisfied of that?’ She had her finger on the door-latch, and was evidently about to fly somewhere with the joyful tidings, when her father stopped her for a moment to say: ‘Of course he is not, my dear; it is not a part of my system that any pupil of mine should run away with other people’s daughters, or should marry any of my own.’ These last words, pronounced with great distinctness, considerably mitigated the glad tone of the speech with which the young lady entered her sister’s chamber: ‘He is innocent, dear Ellen;

papa says it's all a mistake about Mr. Marsden, as far as this poor girl is concerned.'

A little form huddled up on a couch in a storm of grief, ceased its sobbings as these words were uttered, and stretched out its arms in mute gratitude, to be embraced by her who spoke them.

'Poor Phœbe!' said Ellen, presently, in a tone pitiful indeed, but such as one is wont to use whose own overwhelming woe has ebbed away; 'poor wretched Phœbe! what did you hear of her?'

'From papa, nothing; her distracted father must have been unable, I suppose, to give any details. I saw the old man go down the avenue as if ten years had fallen upon him since yesterday; but Mrs. Allwyne has heard half-a-dozen accounts. All the country is ringing with the poor girl's shame already; but nothing seems for certain except this: she came home with Michael from Greendale Rushbearing, after some unpleasant scene there, concerning which, by his own confession, he seems to have reviled, and even struck her. He had, as usual, taken too much to drink, and fell, as soon as he reached home, into a drunken slumber. On awaking in the morning, he found himself alone in the house, and just two lines in Phœbe's handwriting, to say that she had fled with one who really loved her, for that she was miserable at home, and could not stay there longer to be so sworn at and beaten. She begged him to forgive her, and not to try to find her out, for that would be of no use. Her flight must have been planned some time before, since she took two large



boxes of clothes with her, and indeed almost everything she possessed.'

'And might she not have gone to be really married?' asked Ellen earnestly.

'No, my child,' returned Florence sighing; 'if she had had the slightest expectation of marriage, poor Phœbe would have been sure to have mentioned it. What is the strangest feature of this heart-rending business is, that nobody seems to be missing from the neighbourhood: that was no doubt one reason—I hope the only one—why Michael Rosthwaite came to the How.'

'But nobody is missing *here*,' urged Ellen. 'Robert—Mr. Marsden, I mean—stood before the man's very eyes when he so wrongfully accused him.'

'The pupils go away for the vacation in two days,' observed Florence thoughtfully.

'Yes,' replied Ellen, with a sigh, 'they do; that is, all except that horrid Mr. Luders.'

'Yes, except Mr. Luders,' repeated the elder sister to herself; 'that is what puzzles me most.'

## CHAPTER VI.

MR ONSLOW BATEMAN.

It is not our purpose to follow the practice of some novelists in climbing the genealogical trees of each of our *dramatis personæ*, and plucking the fruit thereof; in insisting that the reader shall not only be interested in the hero, but in the hero's great-great-grandfather, and intermediate ancestors; not in the heroine only, but in the long line of heroines who preceded, and culminated in, that charming individual; but still we will venture to cull some extracts from the life of Mr. Onslow Bateman, previous to the time when 'the action' of this our story commences. One insuperable bar to our going very far into ancestral details concerning this gentleman, and which will at once remove all reasonable ground for apprehension upon that score, is, that we possess no source whatever from which to draw them. He himself never knew who his father was, for his mother, who was the sole repository of that not very important secret, never, as will be seen, confided it to him. Moreover, we will at once declare that there is not going to be any disclosure of this mystery further on; and that the reader, and Mr. Bateman, and ourselves, are all upon an equality as regards any knowledge of the matter. Let it suffice for us to deal with the present generation.

Mr. Onslow Bateman then, the Preceptor of Youth, the Inculcator of correct manners to the Aristocracy of Great Britain and Ireland, was born at no particular place, but in a not uncomfortable travelling-caravan, on the road between Wiesbaden and Frankfurt, in the territory of the Grand Duke of Nassau. We believe—although of course, her vocation had been suspended for some little time preceding that incident—that his mamma, an Englishwoman, was an accòmplished dancer upon the tight and slack ropes ; could stand on stilts with a far greater ease than many persons on their own dignity ; and had a light and graceful touch upon the tambourine. These arts, however, like those more ambitious ones of which the poet speaks, were quite unable to delay the inevitable hour ; and the young professor of them expired of exhaustion, with her baby clutched to her breast, as though, instead of the offspring of poverty and guilt, it had been the long-looked-for heir of all sorts of titles and landed properties. Signor Smittini and his lady, who, when Mr. and Mrs. Smith, had won poor Bessie Bateman's affections, and enticed her to leave England in their establishment, were good-hearted, steadfast people, and having no children of their own, adopted the boy, who in their company saw many men and cities, and before he was ten years of age, might have been called a cosmopolitan. By that time, the handsome, clever lad had become as their own son to them ; and as their experience had shown them that there were serious drawbacks even to the sovereignty of a travelling-company, they determined to give him an

Education other than that of the circle or 'arena.' He was, therefore, put to school at what they persisted in calling his birthplace, Frankfort, where he remained for several years, improving his mind with the greatest diligence. He was about fourteen years of age when he first made acquaintance with the neighbouring salons of Homburg—not as a player, indeed, but as a rapt spectator of the varying fortunes and behaviour of the players. The young student here first discovered his own aptitude for that art in which he afterwards became such a proficient—the study of human nature. The calm Professional, the suspicious Tyro, the wary Cheat, the passionate Dupe, the *Habitué*, and the casual Player, he could detect at almost the first glance; and his boyish prophecies concerning them, although seldom uttered, gave to himself, in their frequent fulfilments, a rare and exquisite pleasure.

One afternoon, when he was spending, as usual, his holiday-hours in this scene, so uncongenial, as might well have been thought, to one of his tender years, a middle-aged gentleman entered, and took his seat at the *rouge-et-noir* table. Although he soon lost very heavily, his ill-luck did not seem to afflict him, and the lad drew near to mark this philosophic stranger, who could part with his *rouleaux* so continuously, and yet have an eye for the gay company around him, and even for the beautiful garden and pleasant champaign upon which the huge windows of the salon opened.

'You are young, my lad,' observed this indifferent gambler, 'to be in such a place as this. See, there's

another rouleau gone after the rest. I hope you have better luck with your florins than I have !'

'I have but few florins, sir,' returned the boy, respectfully, 'and those I cannot afford to risk ; but I have luck, I think, for I often tell to myself who will win, and who will lose, beforehand.'

'Then sit here in my seat, my good lad, and try to save for me this remnant of my treasury, or, at least, to delay its loss : it cannot possibly go faster out of your hands than mine. Now, then, *rouge* or *noir*? Which is it to be?'

'Stay a minute,' returned the boy in a whisper, his face flushing with excitement at the charge intrusted to him. 'How much am I to put on?'

'Whatever you like,' replied the gentleman. 'But see, the ball is beginning to roll slowly ; you must make haste.'

Master Bateman, who was at least as well aware of what he was about as his full-grown adviser, took up in his hand a considerable sum of money, and placed it upon the red colour.

'*Rouge gagne, noir perd!*' shouted the croupier ; and the firm, which consisted of the Man and the Boy, became at once in a position to declare a dividend.

'You're a bold lad,' cried the gentleman, with genuine admiration. 'But we are surely not going to risk all that upon the red again?'

'*Rouge gagne, noir perd!*' repeated the croupier, and quite a little gold-mine was once more emptied into the coffers of the recently started company.

After several more lucky ventures, and when the

gentleman had not only retrieved his fortunes, but found himself heavily on the winning side, young Bateman suddenly observed; 'I can play no longer, sir; my luck is gone.'

'Let us come into the garden, then, and have an ice,' returned his companion, gathering up quite a little mountain of coin. 'And now,' continued he, when they were seated under a large lime-tree, and only reminded of the neighbourhood of the gambling-room by a pleasant music of gold and silver, which sounded quite rill-like and pastoral, 'where on earth did your luck and your good-looks come from? You never can belong to any of that tribe of knaves and simpletons yonder?'

'Sir,' said the boy in English, 'I am, as I believe, half a fellow-countryman of your own, and as you say, have no relations hereabouts, nor indeed elsewhere. As to my luck, that was simply a matter of observation. I never staked till I saw Durchen stake, who is a professional gamester—sharper, perhaps you would call him—whom I have seen to win here when no one else did. If he staked not, I put down only a very small sum, which we generally lost, you remember. When he went away, which he did as soon as he observed our method of play, my luck, as you call it, would, I knew, go also.'

'Well,' returned the other, 'that was better than luck, for it was judgment. I begin to have a great opinion of you. I am Sir Gilbert Onslow, a rich man, who feels inclined to assist you. I was about to divide our gains, and so to part company, but perhaps we may do better than dissolve partnership

so speedily. I have some cheroots here which I will smoke, while you, if you please, will confide to me your history.'

William Bateman—for Signor Smittini had dowered him with his own Christian name—had never met among his life-studies any specimen such as was now addressing him in so singular a manner; but his ready acuteness at once sanctioned the unreserved confession to which his really affectionate nature had been moved by the baronet's kindly manner.

When he had concluded, Sir Gilbert Onslow announced himself as his future patron; obtained the most probable address of the peripatetic Signor Smittini; and filling the lad's pocket with silver, promised to call at his Frankfort school on the ensuing day.

To cut this retrospective story as short as possible, let us merely say that, after no great lapse of time, Master William became Master William Onslow Bateman at the baronet's own request, and exchanged for that gentleman's patronage the affectionate but humble aid of the Smittinis; that he was sent to Bonn, where he carried off all sorts of honours, fought several duels with successful grace, and acquired a code of morals and religion, the easiest fitting perhaps that was ever worn by any preceptor of youth before or since. At eighteen years of age, this young man had no contemporary superior to himself in beauty, accomplishments, and that peculiar charm of manner which it is not in the power of either birth or education to bestow, but

which polite learning grafts upon some kindly stock to delight all degrees of men—and women.

About this period, Sir Gilbert sent for him to his own mansion in England, where, had he pleased, he might doubtless have easily found himself one of the family. The far-sighted lad, however, declined this elevation, and contented himself, as the humble guest of the baronet, with gaining golden opinions from all the high-born visitors who frequented Broadslope Park, or the house in Grosvenor Street, in their seasons. And not from the visitors only. Lucy Onslow, the heiress of these vast possessions, a young lady of seventeen, and yet under the tutelage of a governess, was soon quite of the same mind as the rest of the world regarding the extraordinary merits of young Bateman. In vain did Margaret Brand, the preceptress in question, herself not insensible to the young man's merits, make use of her more matured (by three years) experience to expatiate upon 'those dangerous guides, the feelings,' and depict in the darkest colours the miseries of a *mésalliance*. Miss Lucy would marry Onslow Bateman, or else nobody; and when reasoned with, would add, that she would go into a nunnery, or even die first, rather than give him up. Under these circumstances, which were really getting rather serious, and—which was almost worse—were becoming public, Sir Gilbert held a private interview with his protégé. What actually took place thereat, we are not in a position to disclose; but certain it is that all intercourse of a really friendly character ceased between them from that hour, and that in spite of



the young man's noble renunciation of the girl, and acceptance of Miss Brand in her stead; which dispelled all absurd reports, and was an immense relief to several good families in the neighbourhood with marriageable sons. It was said, indeed, by Mr. Onslow Bateman's detractors, that the price at which the sacrifice was purchased by the baronet was an excessively high one, and took the very tangible shape of dowry for the governess; and that neither the feelings of the lady who was given up, nor those of the lady who was taken, were at all consulted by the extremely agreeable young gentleman in question. However, there was no open breach between him and Sir Gilbert. As soon as Mr. Bateman was married, and known to be in want of pupils, he had more offers of them from the very highest quarters than he could accept; so that if he had been of a saving disposition, or could have looked to anything beyond present luxury, he might soon have been in easy circumstances; even when his wife died—a loss which he felt deeply, not only because she had been an excellent manager of his household, but because she had loved him with a devotion that had astonished himself—and one of his two daughters had grown to beautiful womanhood, his early conduct in the matter of Miss Lucy Onslow stood him in good stead. It was agreed among his aristocratic patrons, that a man who, out of a strict sense of duty, had given up a most tempting match for himself, would never permit his daughters to be less scrupulous; and hitherto, experience had proved them right.

Mr. Onslow Bateman had been a great wanderer over the face of Great Britain since his marriage, but his peregrinations were no longer made in a caravan. He always took a good-sized house, and one, if possible, situated in a picturesque county; for, in addition to his other accomplishments, he was a very tolerable painter, and had a genuine taste for nature as seen through the medium of the fine arts. He had been at Teesdale How for some two years, and enjoyed in that neighbourhood, as wherever else he had temporarily settled, the reputation of being as great a gentleman as the squire, and as great a scholar as the parson. Nevertheless, and in spite of this dangerous eminence, with neither squire nor parson had Mr. Onslow Bateman the slightest difficulty in 'getting on.' To have called him 'a man of the world,' would have been greatly to underrate his delicate acuteness; he was a man of both worlds, and possessed the marvellous faculty of convincing spiritual pastors of his humility and orthodoxy without very regularly listening to their sermons. His daughters went to church unfailingly; so did his pupils; so did Mrs. Allwyne; nay, not a servant at Teesdale How was permitted to miss hearing the Rev. Allen Brooklet's morning-discourse, although the edifice wherein he ministered was more than two miles distant; but Mr. Onslow Bateman himself—comforted, doubtless, by the sense of his own self-denial in such a matter—was content to keep house alone on Sunday mornings, and forego the inestimable privilege.

## CHAPTER VII.

## MASTER AND PUPIL.

ROBERT MARSDEN had not long been 'white-washing'—as the process of regeneration under Mr. Onslow Bateman was called by that young prodigal—but he flattered himself he knew his master well. In this he doubtless erred, but not entirely; for it is exceeding hard for the most worldly wise to conceal his weaknesses from those of his own household, and, least of all, from clever and unscrupulous lads, to whom the gift of charity is seldom accorded. Mr. Bateman was aware that there had never entered into his fold an inmate so dangerously quick-sighted as Robert Marsden, and would, so far as his peace of mind was concerned, have preferred to live with a dozen wolves, such as Bartholomew Luders, with scarcely a rag of sheep's-clothing among them. On the eve of a discussion with most persons, he was wont to determine his own line of argument beforehand, and to force them by mental strength and dexterity into the wished-for channel; but when he had seriously to do with Robert Marsden, he stripped himself of all preconcerted plan, and entered the lists a naked athlete, only lubricated with that sweet oil of insinuation which belonged to him as properly and naturally as turpentine to a pine-tree.

'Well, Marsden,' said he, re-entering the break-

fast-room with the most ingenuous of smiles, 'I've managed to pack that troublesome fellow off, and, I hope, have cleared your character.'

'Thank you, sir,' replied the young man warmly. 'I am extremely sorry to have been even the innocent cause of such an unpleasant scene; that *you* should have been so inconvenienced, is bad enough, but that the young ladies should have been compelled to listen to such a charge from that vulgar fellow'—

'As far as that goes,' interrupted Mr. Bateman carelessly, 'there is no great harm done, my good sir; my daughters are not fine ladies, and will never have the opportunity of becoming so; between ourselves, they will probably be one day governesses—indeed, they would *certainly* be so did anything happen to me—and it would be, therefore, an act of cruelty to bring them up like hot-house plants, unaccustomed to the least rude breath of vulgarity.' He hesitated for a moment, during which the young man examined with foot and eye the anatomy of a rose on the pattern of the carpet, and then continued: 'But, unfortunately, this sad business itself remains pretty much where it was, Marsden; the girl is gone, and although Michael Rosthwaite has acquitted *you* of abducting her, we know there must be some one guilty.'

'Sir,' said Marsden hastily, and answering to the tone rather than the words of his interlocutor, 'I have already given you my word of honour that I have had nothing whatever to do with this matter; I now have to add, upon my word of honour, that neither do I know who has had to do with it.'

Mr. Onslow Bateman commenced a game of play with his watch-chain, which occupied him for some seconds, and bestowed a tolerably long look upon the landscape before he remarked, quietly: 'During some conversation which we had some six weeks ago, Marsden, upon an occasion to which it is not now worth while to refer, was not some sort of promise entered into with regard to your attendance at these village-feasts at night?'

'There was, sir.'

'Did you not promise, in particular, that you would not go to Greendale?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Upon your word of honour?'

'Yes, sir.'

'So I understood, Marsden. Well, we all have our temptations and our falls, nor am I one of those—and the fact of your being in this house, Marsden, you must forgive me for saying so, proves it—who believes that he who errs and regrets his error, is more likely to err again than before his first mistake: a man is not like a horse in this respect, which, once broken-kneed, becomes a stumbler.'

Robert Marsden had really begun to be ashamed of himself, when this affectation of forbearance, as he considered it, on the part of his tutor, restored his mind to tranquillity. 'You have three hundred pounds per annum, my good sir, in return for this charitable forgiveness,' thought the practical youth.

'You will answer me truly and without reserva-

tion, I am sure,' continued the tutor, 'when I ask you to tell me what occurred at the Rushbearing.'

Marsden described in accurate detail all that took place upon the preceding evening, as regarded himself, including his quarrel with Luders, and that gentleman's departure at ten o'clock, and finishing with his own lonely return at a far later hour, on foot across the Fells.

'Thank you, Marsden,' said Mr. Bateman, when the narrative was concluded. 'I hope by the time you come back at the end of the vacation, all this will be satisfactorily cleared up, and the unfortunate girl restored to her parent. And now,' continued he with warmth, and the air of one who has finally got rid of an unpleasant subject, 'where are you going, Marsden, when you leave us next Tuesday? Do you take a gun to your father's moor, as you did last year, and which we had such good cause to remember in those great boxes of grouse, or do you stay in the south?'

'I think I shall stay in the south, sir; but I am not sure: my plans are rather unsettled at present, but I hope soon to write and let you know.'

The Tutor and Pupil parted with a hearty shake of the hand—the latter with a curious twitching of the lips, which became a smile as he left the room for the study-chamber shared by himself and his two companions; the former to make the following memorandum in his note-book: *To write privately to Mr. Marsden, senior, next week, and discover what the young man is doing with himself.* 'He is as cunning as a gray fox,' mused the Tutor, 'and I don't know at

this moment for certain, whether he is the real culprit or not.' From which soliloquy we must infer that this gentleman had not quite that confidence in the matter on hand, himself, with which he had so dexterously inspired Michael Rosthwaite.

## CHAPTER VIII.

## THE SKETCH-BOOK.

NEARLY three months passed away before Teesdale How again received its complement of inmates ; for Messrs. Ryder and Marsden had found their holidays agreeable, and Mr. Onslow Bateman was not the man to shorten the pleasure of his pupils in that respect. The intervening time had passed with the two sisters very pleasantly ; for although Mr. Bartholomew Luders had remained, as was threatened, at the How, he had not inflicted his society upon them unnecessarily. He seldom came in before dinner-time, and often not until very late at night ; and had, in short, made himself, by the negative process, as agreeable to them as lay in his power. The beautiful tints of Autumn had faded utterly from the surrounding landscape, and snow had already fallen thickly upon the higher Fells ; the mountain dells had become dreary solitudes ; the laughing becks wore Winter's freezing sneer ; and all the land, late full of troops of visitors, was silent and deserted. Nor were the minds of men less changed than the face of Nature. Phœbe Rosthwaite was still missing, nor had anything further been heard of her disappearance ; but she was no longer the constant topic of conversation in the neighbourhood, and guesses concerning the object of her unhappy attachment had ceased without being

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resolved. Her father was not a popular person; and now that his vicarious notoriety was on the wane, was obliged to content himself with that never-failing companion, the Bottle, to whose consolation he became so largely indebted, that there were not a few who asserted that Michael's short-lived indignation had been feigned, and that he himself knew where Phoebe was gone, and was not altogether dissatisfied with her departure. This, indeed, was not the fact; but, by a just retribution, a base and selfish motive is never wanting, in the opinion of his slighted fellow-creatures, for the behaviour of a base and selfish man. Ryder and Marsden resumed the intimacy they had recommenced at the beginning of the vacation, and the former was well inclined, as young men generally are, to forget his old dislike even of Luders, now that some time had intervened since their last meeting; but the West Indian seemed to prefer his own company, and left them to pursue their various country-pleasures without him.

It was late in November when the two friends received news of a certain Hunting of the Sweetmart, to be held some eight miles off, among the Fells, on the ensuing day; and they good-naturedly determined to ask Luders to join them in partaking of the sport. They went up to his room for that purpose, but, as was usual, he was not within, but had departed on some expedition of his own: not a sketching one, evidently — although he did draw, even in that winter weather — for his sketch-book lay upon the table, with the chalks beside it. It was full of drawings very nicely executed; and they

thought it no harm to take it down with them when they went to tea, to amuse the young ladies with its contents. Many a solemn crag and solitary mere were therein depicted with that free, bold touch which is the autograph of a master-hand, so that even those of the spectators who most disliked the artist, could not but forget their antipathy in admiration of his skill.

‘What strange weird subjects Mr. Luders chooses,’ remarked Florence Bateman; ‘mere beauty seems to have but little charm for him.’

‘Has it not?’ cried Ryder, laughing, and holding up a portrait in his hand. ‘I think this a very charming young woman, at all events, and admire his taste exceedingly.’

‘Well, as far as her back-hair goes—and it goes a good way,’—observed Marsden, ‘I agree with you; but I should like him to have drawn her face.’

‘Even in the figure, however, there is despondency,’ urged Florence. ‘She is leaning over a table with her forehead resting on her hand, like one who reads; but there is no book before her’—

‘Oh, how delicious!’ interrupted Ellen, clapping her hands; ‘see what *I* have found! Here is the Haunted House, and all that belongs to it!’

‘What! the ghost?’ inquired Marsden with a start of pretended alarm.

‘No; but all *but* the ghost,’ returned she; ‘the north side and the south side, the east side and the west side’—

‘Ay, and the *inside* too, by all that’s gloomy!’ continued Marsden. ‘Here are the two rooms that

have still a roof left on them above-stairs ; and here is the little flight of steps that leads up to the ruined attics, Ryder, which you insisted on ascending, at the peril of your neck, last summer. I should have supposed that by this time the whole fabric had come down together.'

'What would the poor ghost do then?' laughed Ellen merrily.

'It would come to the How,' returned Florence, in sepulchral tones.

'Who is that who is about to honour us with his presence?' inquired Mr. Bateman, putting away his book, and rising from his customary arm-chair by the fire to approach the group.

'Only the ghost from Ladybank, sir,' replied Marsden; 'he will call to request you will be so good as to lay him in the Red Sea.'

'We lay our telegraphs instead of our ghosts there now-a-days,' replied the Tutor with that sort of smile which betokens more incredulity than a whole encyclopædia of materialism. 'What taste is this which leads Luders to depict ruined tenements and haunted houses? I am quite sure he did not derive it from any too great application to the dead languages. Here's Michael Rosthwaite's mill, I see, which is itself almost dropping to pieces by this time; and here is' — Mr. Onslow Bateman paused in his researches among the drawings, and lowered his voice pathetically—'here is a poor human ruin that was at one time doubtless fair and goodly to behold. What melancholy in the girl's large eyes, what weight upon her brow, what piteous eloquence

in even the folded and despairing hands! Why, Luders must have been a poet to have imagined such a picture, as well as an artist to have painted it!

'Thank you, sir,' exclaimed a sudden voice close to Mr. Bateman's elbow, so deep and hoarse with passion that Ellen uttered quite a little shriek of terror. 'I am obliged to you for your good opinion, but that sketch-book is private, and my property.' Bartholomew Luders stood in the midst of that startled company with eyes as cold and staring as those of the Sphynx; his hands, trembling with fury, were employed in gathering together the drawings upon the table, but his looks wandered the while from Ryder to Marsden, and back again, like a tiger in doubt as to which of two victims he should spring at and rend asunder first. 'May I ask,' cried he, 'to which of you two *gentlemen* I am indebted for this public exhibition of my sketches? Did you bring my private letters down here also? They were in my room with these, and the desk—as I daresay you know—was left unlocked.'

It was horrible to see the satanic rage of this man, so self-contained and cold by nature: it seemed as if one of the demons of old time possessed him, so ungovernable was his fury; all the more terrible, too, by contrast with the pleasant home-look of the room, the peaceful occupation of the company, and especially with the polished calmness, which even this outbreak failed to ruffle, of Mr. Onslow Bateman.

'When you have taken your drawings, which are really remarkably beautiful, up-stairs,' remarked that gentleman, quietly, 'I am quite sure, Luders, you

will come down again, and apologise to all of us for this singular behaviour. We have been very much pleased with the treat your art has afforded us, and were quite unaware that we were doing any harm in admiring it.'

'Really, sir,' stammered Luders, who was becoming conscious by degrees of what was happening, 'I did not mean'——

'I think you had better go up-stairs, Luders,' reiterated the Tutor with overwhelming suavity; 'I think you will collect yourself better up-stairs.'

The wild beast, still dreadfully glaring, but somewhat cowed by the eyes which had themselves begun to wear an expression very foreign to their usual placidity, withdrew from the apartment, and retired growling to his den.

'This peculiarity in West Indian natures,' began Mr. Onslow Bateman in explanation, 'of being excited by trivial—— Marsden, you will oblige me by staying in the room for the present. My dears, you look a little tired, as well as frightened; I think you are right to be thinking of retiring.'

Nothing was really further from the young ladies' minds than the idea of going to rest without hearing the debate upon this domestic fracas; but with their customary docility, they at once lit their candles, and went up, if not to bed, at all events to their sleeping-apartment.

'It was very unmanly as well as ungentlemanlike in Luders, sir, to behave in that manner before the ladies,' remarked Marsden impatiently; 'I hope they will not consider that I, that we'——

'They will not, of course, see blame where no blame is,' interrupted—nay, 'slid in' (he never 'interrupted')—Mr. Onslow Bateman; 'but it would not have mended matters for you to have had a personal quarrel with him upon the subject. I beg your pardon for having laid any check upon your movements, but I feared that you were leaving the room just now, Marsden, with some such purpose in your mind.'

'I was going to inquire,' hesitated that young gentleman, 'what the dickens he meant by it, that was all.'

'You will oblige me by not doing so, Marsden; do you understand me?'

'Yes, sir,' replied the other laughing, 'I do, and I will.'

'Ryder,' continued the Tutor, 'what book is that on which you are so deeply engaged?'

'Bacon's Essays,' returned the young student, blushing furiously.

'An excellent volume,' observed Mr. Bateman, 'but none the better for being read upside down, which is, I perceive, the system you have adopted with it. You have heard what Marsden and I have been saying, I think. I wish you to promise me'—

'Please, sir, I can't,' exclaimed the young man with ludicrous volubility, 'or at least I had much rather not. I really must have some explanation from Mr. Luders. In point of fact,' stuttered Ryder, 'and begging your pardon, sir, I mean to punch his head. I don't care about what he said to *me* tuppence—two *pence*,' repeated he emphatically, as he

warmed with his subject; 'but to have put himself into such a fury before the young ladies, sir—to go and frighten women in that manner—it's a precious shame: nobody but a' (here Mr. Bateman coughed, and purposely lost a word) 'bully like himself would have done such a thing. If it had not been for their presence, and for yours, sir,' added the indignant young fellow rather parenthetically, 'upon my honour, I would have taken him by the scruff of the neck, and ducked him in the lake.'

Never before, in his Tutor's presence, had the young man indulged in so prolonged a speech, and it was an admiration of his progress in that respect, perhaps, which caused that gentleman to forget its somewhat rebellious character; at all events, his features wore a benevolent, not to say a genial expression, which presently blossomed into a smile; finally, he laughed a ringing laugh, and stirring the silver money gently in his pockets—that 'simmering' of wealth which is so grateful to the temporarily prosperous—he ejaculated: 'Well, I suppose when I was your age—you lucky fellows—I should have ducked him too; at least, as you were saying, if my Tutor had not been in the room. But it must not be,' added Mr. Onslow Bateman sadly; 'it would be no sort of satisfaction to anybody after all.'

'Oh, wouldn't it, though, by Jove!' cried Ryder; 'I beg your pardon, sir, but it really would be a very great satisfaction.'

'Not, at all events, to *me*,' returned the Tutor gravely; 'and not to my daughters, Ryder, we may be sure, who would be thus, by your own confession,

made the partial cause of such an outrage. I am sure, when you think of this, you will promise to let the matter drop.'

'Very well, sir,' replied the reluctant Ryder, 'I will do as you please.'

'You are a couple of good boys,' returned the Tutor, laughing; 'and now, go you to bed, and bring down no more sketch-books that don't belong to you.'

When Mr. Onslow Bateman was left alone, he threw off, at once, that mask which was none the less stifling because it fitted him with such apparent ease. His face exhibited all the scorn and indignation of one insulted by a lower creature, whom he was yet unable to spurn. 'Fool that I was to take the fellow at any price,' soliloquised he; 'of such a stock, and with such a character as he had already earned for himself, what chance of amendment—pshaw—what cant one learns! What hope for such a ruffian but the gallows? and even from that benefit he is precluded by his social position. And yet I did not think he would have dared to show his cloven hoof to *me*. It must have been either drunkenness or madness that got the better of him; but neither drunkard nor madman shall behave in that manner to me in my own house. It's the last half-year, at all events,' mused he, after a little pause; 'and yet,' after another, 'it would be giving up one's West Indian connection too.'



## CHAPTER IX.

## THE CHAT.

THERE is nothing in this world, in the way of conversation, that young ladies delight in, more than in that mystic matter 'a chat;' by which is meant not a mere *tête-à-tête* affair that may take place between acquaintances in a drawing-room, but a cozy talk between two bosom school-friends—eternal friends, as they seem to one another—with their 'back-hairs' let down, their pretty little feet resting upon the fender of the bed-room fireplace, and nothing but the dreamy noise of the brushes upon their silken tresses to intercept their very considerable flow of words. In after-life, when married, and each with a newly-arrived baby of her own, their conversation may be, under the like circumstances, as mutually interesting; but there will then be a suspicion of the other's affecting a superiority—not as regards herself, but with respect to the size, colour, or natural intelligence of her own infant, which will detract from their otherwise perfect happiness. There may, therefore, be said to be *nothing*, in all the diversified bliss of female colloquy, equal to the chat held by two young virgins *en déshabillé*, previous to their retirement to their common couch. If one of them is engaged to be married, and the other not, the latter will often not only be no less friendly

in her manner, but will interest herself in the appearance, virtues, and future prospects of the Intended in a way that would certainly put the friendship of man and man to the blush. Jonathan never could have borne with David in his tremendous narrations of the charms of his numerous beloved objects, and far less have helped him in the description of them. Damon would have cursed Pythias in his heart if he had enlarged to him confidentially upon the merits of the future Mrs. P. But women are differently constituted in this respect, and are either in reality more unselfish, while they applaud their beloved Lucy's Mr. Jones, or picture to themselves the coming man, and dilate, in reality, all the time, upon the ideal qualities of some Mr. Jones of their own. There is no doubt, indeed, that such praising of other people's property must, even to their angelic natures, be a little trying; and therefore—since, if they are *both* engaged, the same rivalry occurs as when they have babies—the 'chat,' proper and perfect, may be defined as a midnight conversation under cozy circumstances between two affectionate young ladies who are unengaged: of course, there is one of them, at least, 'in love,' but that only gives a fillip to the 'chat,' as affording the ground for a little agreeable raillery.

Imagine, then, the satisfaction of the sisters, Florence and Ellen Bateman, in their warm and pretty dressing-gowns, before a comfortable bedroom fire, some thirty minutes or so after they have been 'hinted' out of the drawing-room at Teesdale How. The younger betrays in her flushed cheeks and

sparkling eyes the delight she feels, for is there not, in addition to the usual elements of 'a chat,' a regular domestic 'row' to talk about? Her hair is lying where no pupil—and, indeed, no *eye*, save her sister's—ever saw it, namely, on her lap; hiding her delicate ears in its cloven fall, and rippling all about her 'loose jacket' in a manner enchanting to behold, but such as this pen is far too bashful to describe. The brush—that hideous object in the hands of Man, endeavouring with two huge specimens of it to effect a parting at the back of his head—is as charming and appropriate in her lily fingers as ever was looking-glass in mermaid's; and now she draws the rough side slowly through the golden threads, and now she rubs, nay, scratches thoughtfully, the tip of her nose with the smooth side.

'Come, Florry,' cried she pathetically, 'when *will* you have done with that dressing-table? I haven't said a word yet, according to my promise, although I'm dying to hear what you think about it all. How grave you look! You don't think Mr. Luders will murder anybody, do you? *You hope not!* Goodness gracious, of course you do; but if you *think* so, don't you think that we ought to tell papa?'

Florence shook her head sorrowfully as she replied: 'Papa will know all that is to be known soon enough. Oh, Nelly dear, we are going to hear dreadful news!'

'Florence,' exclaimed the younger sister, changing colour, 'what do you mean? What is going to happen? and why are you standing there as if nothing can be done?'

'Nothing *can* be done, alas, or at least not now, my love,' returned the other; 'nor do I apprehend further harm; but oh, sister, sister!'—she took the chair beside Ellen's and sat down, looking into the fire with an expression wonderfully foreign to any that is proper to 'a chat'—'I wish that dreadful man had never come to Teesdale How.'

'That Mr. Luders, you mean! Yes, horrid Pup! I wish papa would let us choose his pupils for him. We would keep Mr. Ryder, though; would we not?' added she roguishly; 'we would keep our pattern young man, Florry.'

Florence smiled but feebly, and shook her head so deprecatingly, that the long black tresses waved like some Danish raven-banner over a beautiful but not unthreatened champaign. 'I cannot think of any one just now,' said she, 'save Mr. Luders, and—and'——

'Oh, there's another agreeable young person also in the matter, is there?' exclaimed Ellen, 'and we can't get his name out, can't we? Dear me, we must be very far gone;' and the thoughtless, charming young creature laughed as merry a laugh as though she had not been close upon tears ten minutes before. 'Now, look you,' continued she, holding up a dainty finger in her sister's smileless countenance, 'I won't be frightened again, so don't you try it. Mr. Luders was in a very bad temper to-night, and I think he had just a little too much to drink, besides; but that was all.'

'That was not all,' returned her sister slowly.

‘He had a very good cause—or a very strong one, at least—for the anger which he exhibited.’

‘Good cause! strong cause? What, for putting himself into such a dreadful passion that he made me scream! My dear Florry, what *do* you mean?’

‘If you had done something very, very wicked, Ellen, for the consequences of which no reparation could be made, even if you wished to make it, which, however, you did not wish, and if nobody knew or even suspected you to have done it, and if the blame was laid upon innocent shoulders instead of yours, would you not be angry, think you, with the person who was, at last, even the unwitting cause of your criminality being discovered?’

‘Bless me, Florence, what dreadful things you do say sometimes! The idea of supposing one’s self all that just for the sake of argument! No, I don’t think I should have been angry in such a case. I think I should have been glad to have got the horrid secret told, and to be no more living a life of hypocrisy as well as of crime. But, thanking you all the same, Florence, love, I don’t flatter myself with the notion of being capable of any such very tremendous crime as you seem to have in your mind.’

Florence embraced her sister affectionately, by way of assuring her that she did not think that either, and then continued: ‘A bad and godless man thinks differently, Ellen. I may be wrong, and if so, Heaven pardon me, but I do believe as surely as that you and I are now sitting here, that Mr.

Luders is the wretch who has lured away poor Phoebe Rosthwaite.'

'Impossible!' ejaculated Ellen. 'I have often thought him wicked enough; but he has never left us, even for a day, all through the holidays. It is quite impossible.'

'I thought so, too,' replied Florence gravely, 'until to-night; but now I feel confident that it was he, and no other. Did you see any likeness in that first picture which Mr. Marsden admired so?'

'Why, there was no face at all,' said Ellen; 'the figure had its back to the artist.'

'True, sister; but I recognised that little head, though not on the instant. Do you not recollect how that poor girl wore her beautiful chestnut hair?'

'I see what you mean now,' replied Ellen thoughtfully; 'but such a fancy is not to be trusted; still less, surely, Florence, ought it to form the foundation of a charge so serious, so terrible; nay, even if it was poor Phoebe'——

'It *was* she,' returned Florence firmly; 'there is not the slightest doubt of that. I caught a glimpse of the other sketch papa held up, and which Mr. Luders snatched from him so furiously. It was Phoebe's portrait: as like as any photograph, and yet so changed, so changed! I should have known it anywhere, and shuddered to have known it, as I do now.'

The dark eyes were riveted on the flame, without a tear, but not unpityingly; there was woman's tenderness, but something of man's endeavour, too, in

their still depths. 'O Heaven! that I knew what we ought to do, Ellen; I mean what God would have us to do; perhaps we might save her yet.'

'Poor Phœbe; poor young Phœbe!' sobbed the younger sister! 'I don't see what is to be done, I'm sure. Poor thing! But why—why, Florence, should not Mr.—should not that dreadful man have drawn the picture from recollection of her, from imagination?'

'No artist—not the best in Britain—could have done it, as that face was done, except from life.'

'Why, then, did not papa recognise it as well as yourself?'

'He never chanced to see her, I suppose; he never could have seen her, and yet failed to recognise that likeness.'

'But even then,' persisted Ellen, clinging with the pertinacity of weakness to every straw of hope, 'even then, why should not Mr. Luders have taken the picture long ago?'

'No, Ellen, no; it is impossible. Even if that deceived, heart-broken Human Ruin, as papa truly called it, could have been taken from so fair a structure as poor Phœbe was—if the artist had striven ever so perversely to make decay of glory—there is testimony still more terrible and sure. There was a date! I saw it as the man held the drawing in his passionate hand; November 28. *That picture, Ellen, was drawn yesterday!*'

## CHAPTER X.

## LOST ON THE FELLS.

ON the next morning, except in the more thoughtful looks of the two young ladies—who, however, concealed, as only women can, their indignation and distress—no traces of the overnight disturbance could be read in any countenance at the breakfast-table at Teesdale How. Ryder and Marsden, having quietly slept upon the matter, and been prevented from active hostilities with Luders, were rather inclined to ascribe some of his violence to the cause their tutor had suggested—the West Indian nature of the man; and they became also tardily conscious that it really had been injudicious of them to exhibit to others the private drawings of one who was certainly not their friend.

Mr. Onslow Bateman, who had business at Carlisle that day, and could not return till the next evening, was especially desirous to leave his household in mutual amity, and outdid himself in agreeable affability to promote that end. So well did he succeed, that Ryder found himself telling his foe that it was with the intention of asking him to join the Hunt that day, that they had invaded his apartment the preceding evening. A savage scowl settled for an instant upon Luders' face, but his reply was courteous and conciliatory. He would



accompany them with pleasure, he said, although he had intended to go elsewhere. Where was the Hunt to be held ?

‘On the Weirdale Fells,’ replied Ryder. ‘The running will be stiffish work after the last week’s snow. I hope there will be plenty of sweetmarts.’

‘And what may a sweetmart be ?’ inquired Mr. Onslow Bateman, who knew as perfectly well as though he had been a professed vermin-killer, but the first law of whose nature was, that conversation must by all means be kept up. ‘Is it a bird, or a beast, or a butterfly ?’

‘The sweetmart is a vermin,’ replied Marsden, imitating sporting old Michael Rosthwaite’s pronunciation to the life, ‘that is found three times in four in a broken crag, but noo and then in a bield, like a tod; and who generally has to be smoked out with bracken. I never saw one, but I believe the word is euphuistic for a polecat.’

‘It is a polecat that doesn’t smell, however,’ explained the more accurate Ryder; ‘the other is the foulmart or foomart.’

‘This one is therefore elegantly called “sweet” on account of his negative virtues,’ observed Mr. Onslow Bateman; ‘and upon the same principle, there are a considerable number of human sweetmarts. Well, I hope you’ll have good sport. But Weirdale is a very long way off, surely; and if more snow comes down, which is now threatening us, you will scarcely find your way.’

‘We know every inch of those Fells by this time, sir,’ answered Marsden; ‘besides, we can see Lady-

bank from here, which is almost half-way to Weir-dale, so that we have really only about four miles of trackless walking.'

'Well,' remarked the Tutor, rising, 'you are not children that you will let the dusk overtake you in such a country. You have promised to return to-night, you know, and if you intend to see much of the sport, you had better be off as soon as possible.'

In an hour from that time, and when it was still early in the morning—for they had risen betimes, on account of Mr. Bateman's departure—the three young men and the dog Carlo, who seemed to scent the sport, and would not be denied, were passing the crumbling walls of Ladybank.

'What a dismal-looking ruin it is,' exclaimed Marsden, looking up at it, 'and what an out-of-the-way spot for a human being to build a house in! He must have had the preconcerted purpose of committing a murder in it; and in that case, it should have been convenient enough. I suppose, scarce anybody now sets foot in it from year's end to year's end. The glass is not broken in those two upper windows yet, I see, though the big door has become rather superfluous with those vast gaps on either side of it.'

'I should like to go over the old place,' said Ryder, stopping; 'it would not take us long.'

'I don't think we have any time to lose,' returned Luders; 'it is nearly nine o'clock already.'

'Is it indeed so late?' cried Marsden. 'Then we certainly must push on at once, or we shall miss half the fun. We'll look at the place as we come

home again, when it will be getting dusk, and then—though it seems “a bull” to say so—we shall have a much better chance of seeing the ghost.’

‘And what is the ghost?’ asked Luders carelessly, as he moved on with Marsden, while Ryder reluctantly followed them.

‘It is the perturbed spirit,’ replied the other with mock solemnity, ‘of a departed gentleman—one “limping Lorimer,” as he was called from the fact of his having a wooden leg—who committed a murder in that attic yonder, on a certain November night—and if I remember right, it was the 30th, and this very day. Nothing is seen of him, but he brings with him, unlike the sweetmart, a strong odour of highly concentrated sulphur; while his invisible steps are heard going slowly and heavily from that front door to that front attic. Good heavens!’ ejaculated the speaker suddenly, ‘did you hear that? Look, the window over the door to the right there has burst open!’

The three young men were standing on the hillside, with the haunted house immediately beneath them; the still glazed lattice of the first-floor window, which had been closed as they passed it, was indeed now open, and swung upon its rusty hinges in the morning air with an eerie sound.

‘I’ll see to that at once!’ cried Ryder, bounding downwards

‘Stop, stop,’ ejaculated Luders in a voice whose passionate entreaty arrested the astonished young man at once; ‘I entreat you, stop. If you wish that we should be friends henceforward, and not foes, I

beg that you will not enter that dreadful house to-day !'

The stony eyes of the speaker seemed to express the extremity of despair ; his teeth were clenched, his dark face blanched with that pallor which is only born of rage or fear. 'I beg of you both, as a favour,' he resumed, after a little pause, during which his two companions stared at him with a wonder that mingled largely with contempt, 'to go on now to Weirdale, and not hereafter to speak of my foolish conduct. I was born thus ; I inherit—— Curse that dog,' he cried with sudden impetuosity ; 'call him back, call him back, I say, or I'll cut his throat !'

Poor Carlo, who was upon the eve of making a ghost-hunt upon his private account, came back at once, obedient to the voice of Ryder, for he never paid the least attention to that of Luders, who tormented him not seldom ; and the latter continued : 'I inherit this terror of ghosts from my dead mother. Pray, excuse me.'

'Of course,' said Marsden pityingly, for constitutionally courageous himself, he knew how to make allowance for others who were not so favoured by nature ; 'let us go on at once.'

'Oh, by all means,' assented Ryder coolly, who, it must be confessed, possessed a less charitable disposition in this respect. 'But what a nervous fellow you must be, Luders ! afraid of a ghost at nine o'clock in the morning ! Why, what precious unpleasant nights you must sometimes pass !'

'I own my weakness in the matter of ghosts,'

returned Luders, his tone growing, as it seemed, more defiant as the snow-tracks between them and Ladybank grew longer; 'but I am not afraid of any mortal man, I trust.'

'I daresay not,' returned Ryder dryly, with an undisguised curl of his lip.

'Madmen, forbear your frantic jar!' quoted Marsden gravely; 'let dogs delight to bark and bite. Harry and Tommy, who were so fond of quarrelling, were at last eaten by sweetmarts.'

Laughter is the death of strife; and a merry word from a third person is often a better suppressor of broils than the smoothest speech, since both combatants can afford to laugh at that which suggests compromise to neither.

It was more than an hour before the three descried far off the men and dogs they were in search of—mere black specks upon the shining mountain-side—and it took them then a weary time to come up with them. The sport was not good, and it was long before they found the particular object of their search, which once started, however, afforded a more literal 'run' than did ever fox in the south country. Riding among the snowy Fells is, of course, out of the question, and each man has to trust to his own legs. Sometimes, even thus mounted, the hunter finds himself as completely 'pounded' as his brother of Leicestershire, unable to advance over chasm, or precipice, or treacherous snow-drift, and with nothing for it but to retrace his footsteps—a matter not always very easy. The fatigue is considerable to one who does not shirk his

work, and confine himself to some pinnacle loftier than common (and the keen breeze rather discourtenances such laziness), wherefrom the whole chase—which is generally of a circular character—can often be observed; but still there is much to repay exertion or endurance. On a clear day—and no others will suffice for fell-hunting—the views in all directions are sublime, which in summer were only gloriously beautiful; while the moving throug immediately around, and the thousand echoes awakened on all sides by dogs and men, give animation to a scene which would else be almost forbidding in its too solitary grandeur.

The Weirdale Fells, on which the hunt was held, although of immense extent, are of no great altitude, and the young men were well acquainted with them under their summer aspect. Then, where they now stood upon the frozen snow, the grass grew green and plentifully enough, gemmed with the glittering sun-dew, and plumed in the marshy hollows with the silver bog-cotton; the July breezes did but lift the hair there and tenderly touch the cheek, making out of the juniper-bushes—now in their little snowshrouds—Æolian harps, and setting the delicate harebells dancing to the airy tune; then, from the purple heather in the clefts and upon the crag-tops came the monotonous murmur of the bee; from all sides, from above and beneath, the short, quick crop of the browsing sheep; and perhaps from far away in the blue depths of the summer sky the shrill complaint of the buzzard. Then, each beck sang merrily in its rocky cradle, after every summer

shower, and raced with a hundred kindred streams down to Weirdale beneath, binding with crowns of pearl the brows of the mountain, and glistening like chains of silver from its top to its base. Three tranquil valleys—two, rich with farms and fields—in summer-time reposed beneath these Fells; one, a crescent of pasture-land with one blue tarn, set like a turquoise in an emerald; another, long and winding, with a shining river running through it into an extensive lake at its southern end—the white sails of whose fairy fleet might be seen bending low before the wind upon its surface, and even the white furrow that their keels left in the cloven wave; the third valley, Weirdale itself, lay immediately beneath, the most secluded, if not the most fair of all—shut in by hills on all sides, peaceful, green, with here and there a cottage, and one farm. Very different, however, were the scenes which now presented themselves from this same eminence; and although they had at present but exchanged one kind of beauty for another, there were signs in the air of coming snow and tempest, which threatened soon to make all a chaos of wrath and desolation.

‘I think we shall have a ducking before we get home,’ remarked Ryder, as the three young men stood together on a hillock with panting chests, while, not altogether to their sorrow, the hounds came to a temporary check: ‘the weather looks very dirty, and the day is getting on.’

‘I shall not go back, for one,’ returned Marsden vehemently, ‘until I have had something to eat. Dick Dirleton says, he’ll give us all dinner in Weir-

dale, and there will be sure to be some fun going on there afterwards.'

'Afterwards!' cried Ryder; 'why, how are we to get back in the dark?'

'There's a full moon,' said Marsden confidently; although, for all he knew, it might have been a new one: 'besides, I know my way blindfold.'

'You can see Teesdale How from the fourth fell yonder,' remarked Luders, 'and you could surely get as far as there.'

'Who can see in the dark, man?' replied Ryder angrily. 'I should have thought you would have been more prudent than to back Marsden in such a mad scheme as this.'

'For myself,' observed Luders dryly, 'I don't care what can be seen, or what can not, for I mean to return home almost immediately. I've had enough of this icy work; but I was going to say that if you two wish it, and mean to stop, I would put the drawing-room lamp, when we go to bed, in the north passage-window, which looks out this way, in case of your being late, and you would see that, however dark it was, and the darker the better.'

'That's capital!' cried Marsden gaily; as delighted, perhaps, with the notion of thus getting rid of his benefactor, as with the proposed benefit itself—'that's capital, and you're a capital fellow. That'll do—will it not, Ryder?'

'Well, it of course makes the thing more feasible,' replied the young man, still hesitatingly; 'but I am rather afraid of your forgetting to put the lamp in the window, Luders.'



'Afraid! are *you*, then, afraid of something?' sneered the West Indian. 'I thought you were like Nelson, and did not know what fear was.'

Ryder uttered some retort which had more in it of contempt than of wit and elegance, and left the conversation to be concluded by his friend.

'Well,' said Marsden, 'as you are going home at once, and will not much want it, will you lend us your brandy-flask? That has better stuff in it than any we can get in Weirdale.'

'Yes; I let yon fellow have it for a drink just now; but I'll get it from him directly.'

Luders did so, and made over the flask to Marsden; a large and handsome silver one, apparently almost full. 'And now,' said he, 'I'm off; so good-bye to you.'

'You'll be sure not to forget the light as soon as it gets late, please?'

'Of course not,' cried Luders, turning round—for he was already upon his homeward way. 'Tell Ryder not to fear.'

'What a last look that villain did give us!' observed Marsden. 'I do believe he has a drop of the Fiend's blood in his veins!'

A mocking laugh, which seemed to go some way to confirm this assertion, rang through the frosty air from the retreating Luders.

'He had better try no devil's tricks on me, however,' quoth Ryder savagely. 'I wish I had never passed my word to the governor not to give him what he deserves.'

'Pooh,' returned Marsden; 'the creature is not

worth a thought. See, the hounds have found again!’

It was near nine o'clock that winter's night when Ryder and Marsden started homewards from the comfortable farmhouse at Weirdale. The heaped-up fire and jovial company were by no means willingly exchanged for the dim uncertain moonlight and howling north wind; but Ryder, one good part of whose stubborn character it was never to break his word, was determined to reach Teesdale How before morning, and Marsden did not wish to receive a second forgiveness at the hands of his tutor.

‘Take my advice, young gentlemen, and wait for good honest daylight,’ had been Dick Dirleton's parting words as they left his door; but their reply was given in all the spirit of the hero of *Excelsior*, albeit it was by no means couched in such poetical language.

The long steep pass that led immediately up from the valley to the Fells was so sheltered by the surrounding precipices, that until they reached its summit, they did not feel the full force of their elemental foes; that once attained, however, the north wind swept down upon them like a charge of cavalry, as though it had been an outpost set there by the Spirits of the air to guard their mountain solitude from human intrusion. Doubtless some mystic rites were being celebrated by the powers of Evil upon Weirdale Fell that night; such screams were on the wind, such wailings as of tortured infants, such rush of vehement pursuit, such pas-

sionate threats. No human beings, perhaps, save self-willed, dauntless young Englishmen, would have striven, without a positive necessity to compel them, to force a four-mile passage over the hill-tops against so furious a foe. Nothing, however, was further from the mind of the two travellers than a thought of going back again.

'We shall have no hill-fog to-night, at all events,' cried Marsden laughing, and speaking through a trumpet made of his two hands, and brought close to his companion's ear.

'No, but we shall have something worse,' bawled Ryder, taking a similar precaution; 'we shall have snow: a big flake lit on my nose just now, and there's another.'

'I hope your nose may get the whole of it,' returned Marsden; 'but I am afraid the fall will be more general. By Jove, let us push on; it's coming down like the open-work of one of Mrs. Allwyne's strawberry-tarts!'

While he made use of that homely metaphor, the windows of heaven were indeed being set wide, and snowed down, as it seemed, in sharpest diagonals the very diamond reticulations of their casements. In a few seconds, the dull midnight landscape had closed in upon them on all sides; and the travellers, as they shielded their eyes from the driving sleet, could discover—and those but faintly—only each other's whitening forms.

'Keep together, and push on,' roared Ryder in a voice of thunder; 'we know where we are at present, at all events.'

'Yes,' returned Marsden gaily, whose spirits, although rising with the situation, were not quite able to escape from the grim sense of it, 'I remember it well. This is where Rosthwaite's uncle was lost in the snow last winter; he was "smooored," as Mr. Burns expresses it, in this identical spot. How Burns, by-the-by, would have enjoyed a scene like this!'

'I wish with all my heart, then, he was here instead of me,' retorted Ryder. 'I don't enjoy it, I can tell you. It's getting darker and darker; and with this snow falling, we shall not be able to see the light, even if Luders puts it where he said he would.'

'If he does? Why, good heavens, you don't imagine he would risk our lives by not doing so?' cried Marsden in a tone of some alarm.

'I trust the man in nothing,' answered Ryder gloomily; 'and I believe him capable of anything vicious. What a leer was that he wore upon his face at parting! For my part, I felt convinced that he meant to play us false; but I was not going to be called a coward twice by that dog.'

'But it would be murder—an attempt to murder us—nothing less!' argued Marsden gravely. 'If we do not see the light, we shall not know where to steer.'

'Just so,' remarked the other dryly; "'push on" is my motto, as it is Carlo's: good dog, good dog!'

The animal had remained with the two young men in preference to returning with Luders, though he had evidently thought at the time of his departure

—and expressed as much by appealing eyes and expostulatory tail—that the latter was the wisest of the three ; but now, like a good dog as he was, he was making the best he could of a bad business, and leading the way for his human friends, with nose to ground, in a very diligent manner.

‘I can’t make out that Luders one bit,’ observed Marsden after a long pause ; ‘though I did not, I confess, dislike him as you did, until quite lately. He knows a lot of things, and is really very agreeable in his way. He is not a pattern in morals or religion, I am aware, but I don’t know that I have much right to complain in that respect.’

‘He’s a bully and a coward,’ roared Ryder savagely ; ‘that’s what he is.’

‘I am not sure of the last part of that,’ returned Marsden ; ‘that’s the very thing I’m puzzled about.’

‘What ! not a coward, and afraid of ghosts in the broad daylight ?’

‘I don’t believe he *was* afraid,’ returned the other gravely ; ‘I believe he was only shamming to be afraid.’

‘Why ? What for ? For what earthly reason ?’ demanded the incredulous Ryder.

‘I can’t tell you that, I’m sure,’ said Marsden ; ‘but I am sure it is so. Could he have taken all these drawings of Ladybank, inside and outside, think you, which we found in that sketch-book, if he had been afraid of ghosts there ?’

‘That is strange, certainly,’ remarked Ryder, after a pause. ‘I noticed, by my own watch, that he was

lying, when he said it was so late this morning, and urged us not to explore Ladybank. I can't understand it: there must be some devilry in connection with that empty house and Luders. The snow is ceasing, but the rest of the night will be quite dark. We must be nearing the last of the Fells by this time, if Carlo has led us right; and we ought to be able to see the lamp, if lamp there really be.

A sharp cry of intense agony here pierced through the thunder of the wind, and Ryder suddenly missed his companion. Even sooner than he, Carlo had recognised the voice through its disguise of pain, and bounded back. So dark was it, that though Ryder had been only a few steps in advance of his friend, he could scarcely have discovered him but for his canine assistant. Marsden lay groaning on the snow with a twisted ankle. It was no more possible for him to put that foot to the ground, than to use his arms as wings. The other, bending over him, perceived at once the extent of the calamity, and the whole peril of their position, and could not help revealing it in his face.

'Look here, Ryder,' cried Marsden, as he read it written there; 'you leave me where I am. I am plucky now, and bid you go; presently, perhaps, as I grow cold, I shall lose my courage, and want you to commit suicide, because I must die myself. Leave me the dog, if he will stay with me'—Carlo began to whine, and press his cold nose to his friend's cheek, to prove that he would do so—'and as soon as you can get help, send it to me.'

‘My dear Marsden, you are confounding me with Luders,’ returned the other quietly; ‘I shall stay here till I see the light, and then I’ll carry’——

‘Brandy, brandy!’ interrupted Marsden faintly; ‘the flask is in my pocket.’

Ryder took the flask from the almost inanimate possessor, and poured the liquid down the throat of his friend, but it did not suffice to revive him. For a few minutes, while Marsden lay speechless in his arms, and the poor dog trembling by his side, it seemed even to this brave young fellow that the thunderous rolling of the wind above them was the Requiem of them all. But presently staring out into the night, he uttered a joyful cry: ‘The light, Marsden, I see the light in the window; you shall yet be saved.’

‘No light,’ murmured the other in a hoarse low voice—‘no light, or else he has set it in another place, to mislead us. He is a murderer: he has emptied the strong spirit out, and put snow-water into the bottle in its place.’

Ryder thought the speaker wandered in his wits, until he had tasted the vile contents himself; then, hurling the costly flask away with his utmost strength, he exclaimed: ‘Put your arms round my neck, old fellow; we will live yet to pay the villain off; that’s well; now, steady; why you’re light as any feather. Now, Carlo, off again!’

It really seemed as if the young man’s just indignation had given to him the strength of two. Following the dog’s sagacious leadership, and yet finding the light straight before them, he took heart,

feeling persuaded the lamp must have been set in the place agreed upon. Thus through the ever-darkening night the cavalcade moved on more slowly than any funeral procession; the snow had altogether ceased, and the mighty wind—since their route was now almost at right angles to its first direction—no more blew directly in their teeth; nevertheless, Ryder's strength began to fail under the unusual burden, and his legs to totter like those of a drunken man.

'Set me down,' entreated Marsden; 'you good fellow, please to set me down. We are off the Fells now, and I shall not perish of cold, as I should have done up there.'

'I will take you home,' cried Ryder firmly; but while he spoke, the sweat stood thickly on his forehead, and his failing limbs denied what his tongue asserted.

'Then I speak for myself,' returned Marsden with decision. 'I am suffering tortures, torments, with this motion; I *must* be set down, I say; we are now—for I think I have seen it since this hideous darkness lessened—almost close to Ladybank. There, there is the east wall and entrance as Luders drew them. Let me down here.'



## CHAPTER XI.

## THE HAUNTED HOUSE.

A LONELY mansion, uninhabited by mortals, and with the reputation of having a spiritual guest, is not the cheerfullest of shelters in a windy winter midnight. There was nothing of welcome in the look of Ladybank as the moon came out, and showed to those two wanderers the white house standing under the white Fell. As soon as the immediate satisfaction of being behind the courtyard wall, and out of the wind, had abated, they began to think what a dreary spot it was, and to conjure up the tales they had heard of it.

‘It wants but one half hour of midnight,’ observed Ryder, taking out his watch, which the flying clouds now permitted him to see for the first time; ‘we are come just in time for the gentleman in the attic.’

Marsden shuddered. ‘Hark!’ cried he; ‘what’s that?’

‘It’s a sprained ankle acting upon an imaginative mind,’ returned Ryder. ‘We must get inside, or we shall be frozen to death. How the bolts and latches do rattle about this confounded place; I should not have thought there was so much old iron left in it.’

While he spoke, as if the deserted mansion felt

indignant at the remark, and wished to give report of all its metallic treasure in one clang, an eddying gust whirled screeching and jangling through the courtyard, and burst open the vast hall-door in front of them with a crash that echoed from the basement to the ruined upper floors.

‘That is an invitation for us to walk in, and make ourselves comfortable,’ quoth Ryder. ‘The footman has unfortunately gone out for a holiday, and the butler declines to open the door, it not being his “place.”’

Both these young men were brave, but with a difference. The one had imagination, and could not free himself from the supernatural suggestions which the hour and scene awakened; the other only saw before him an old ruin, about which people told lying tales.

Already refreshed by his halt, Ryder once more took up his living burden, and carried him up the worn stone steps to the now open door. The threshold was certainly not inviting. An empty hall, stone floored, and of considerable extent, lay before them, with doorways—but no doors—opening on the right hand into apartments more or less damaged by the elements. On the left hand, a well staircase wound to the top of the house; the steps of it were of stone, but the landings of rotting wood, while of the banisters some lay in the hall beneath, where they had dropped, and the rest, but dangerously useful, tottered in their places, with great gaps between them. The apartments on the ground and first floors had all their casements blown in or

wrenched out by violence of the elements, or of man; but on the second floor, as the young men knew, there were still two rooms in tolerable preservation. The door of the first of these was closed, and resisted their utmost efforts, but the second admitted them into a chamber at least weather-proof, where they determined to remain. Beyond this floor, some wooden steps, upon which no man would trust his feet, led up into the roofless attics. The 'situation,' it must be confessed, was thrilling and melodramatic enough, and not only did Ryder cease to make flippant allusions to the supposed spiritual tenant of the domain, but the very dog crouched and whined, as it had not done, save once, during the whole of their perilous journey. The wind had by this time greatly moderated, but there was yet enough abroad to flap the heavy front-door by fits against the wall, to which its former violence had driven it.

'I will run down and stop that,' cried Ryder, suiting the action to the word, and followed by Carlo, who evidently hailed the movement as a prelude to departure from such unpleasant quarters. With considerable difficulty, for it hung upon only one rusty hinge, the young man replaced the door in its proper position. The staples that had formerly held the bolts within had been forced away by the late crash, and the rusty key which still remained in the lock outside could not be moved; Ryder therefore turned it from without, to prevent the door's flapping back again, and re-entered through one of the gaps in the wall. As he did so, the faint

echo of a footstep seemed to approach from behind the western wall of the courtyard; it came nearer and nearer—the slow, determined, but halting step of a heavy man—and Ryder was on the point of rushing out to discover what visitor could be coming to such a place at such a time, when a sharp cry, almost a scream, from Marsden arrested him, and caused him to spring up stairs without the delay of an instant. The lame man was sitting upright on the bare floor of the room, with a face far paler than even the great pain from which he suffered warranted, and holding his finger in the air, as if demanding silence.

‘Hush, hush,’ cried he, in that suppressed tone, perhaps the most awe-inspiring within the compass of human speech, and pregnant of the long watches of the night, and sickness unto death; ‘there is some one in that next room—there is, so help me Heaven! Hush!’

‘I will *not* hush,’ exclaimed Ryder, aloud and angrily, indignant at the panic to which he felt himself succumbing slowly in spite of himself; ‘I will not be fooled by the wind. I tell you, the wind can make any noise.’

‘The wind can’t turn a key in a keyhole,’ replied Marsden hoarsely. ‘Listen to *that*!’

Certainly, the rusty lock which Ryder had but a minute before fastened was now shot back, and they heard the great door grind on its rusty hinge, and then reclose; the dog, too, which had been left below, began to bark furiously, as at some new-comer.

‘It is twelve o’clock,’ murmured Marsden solemnly; ‘it is the hour and the man!’

Ryder did not answer, but trod softly through the open chamber-door to the head of the staircase, from which, though somewhat dimly, he could discern every flight. Marsden, unable, and perhaps unwilling to move, kept his eyes on his friend, and gathered, as well as he could, in that dim uncertain light, from his countenance, which now grew earnest enough, what was passing below.

And this it was which was taking place upon that ruined staircase before Ryder’s eyes and ears.

A heavy step, without any bodily presence, was coming up deliberately, stair after stair. There was its heavy thud upon the stone when on the steps, and its hollow beat upon the wood when it crossed the landings, not only distinct, but loud, so that its echoes made themselves heard all over the ruined mansion. One foot was brought slowly after the other on to each step, as a very lame man would bring it. As the footsteps approached, so as to bring full within the young man’s vision the person who was coming up stairs, if he had been a corporeal substance—which, however, he was not—the spectacle which the dog presented was strange indeed. Carlo did not seem at all terrified, but transported with impotent rage. Coming up at the same slow rate with the footsteps themselves, he delayed upon each step, as they did, to snap and snarl at the unseen feet which lodged there. With open jaws, it flew at the invisible ankles, at the supernatural trouser-skirts, as it were, of the heavy treading

spirit—if such it was—which perseveringly and unheedingly came on until it was within a stair-flight of the listener. Then Ryder, closely watched by Marsden, who had dragged himself to the doorway of the chamber, descended with ashy lips, but determined tread, some half-a-dozen steps, and on the last of these, and in the centre of it, awaited the ghostly foot-tread.

‘It shall come *through* me,’ muttered the young man to himself, ‘and then, and not till then, will I believe it.’ Close beneath him—close to within three steps of him—ascended the invisible Thing; ascended, too, the dog, taking no notice whatever of Ryder, but snapping and wild with fury as before. Then the young man’s determination gave way. He did not flee, but he withdrew to one side of the broad stone step, away from the banisters, by which the Thing seemed to guide itself, as though they were reliable, and it were in the flesh; and there, with his back to the wall, awaited it. When the Thing, still accompanied by the dog, stood on the very step with him, the atmosphere, which had seemed to be growing colder and colder, became positively icy: he seemed to congeal there as he stood, and only to regain his circulation slowly as the awful Sound went by him up the remaining steps, along the floor, close by the almost paralysed Marsden, and then up the wooden stair with redoubled clangour, into the roofless attics, followed by the dog.

At the same time, a piercing shriek rang through the deserted house from the room into which they

had not entered. There was enough of humanity in the voice to disenthral the young men's minds, half-stupified as they were with supernatural terrors. Ryder rushed up stairs, and with one blow of his foot burst open the locked chamber-door; the next instant, he uttered such an exclamation of pity and astonishment, that Marsden crawled hastily to the entrance of the apartment to perceive with a wonder only second to that with which he had listened to the mysterious footfall, the original of Luder's picture—the attenuated form and haggard features of the lost Phœbe Rosthwaite!

## CHAPTER XII.

## THE LAMP IN THE WINDOW.

‘**HERE they are at last!**’ cried Florence Bateman, late on the afternoon of the Hunting of the Sweet-mart, as she stood with her sister at the drawing-room window, looking out upon the gathering clouds. ‘I was afraid the poor Pups would have been drenched.’

‘I only see Mr. Luders,’ answered Ellen; ‘where are the other two?’

‘They all three went together, so the rest are probably behind,’ returned the elder sister. ‘I don’t wonder at their letting Mr. Luders walk ahead of them, I’m sure; for my part, I cannot look upon that wretch now without loathing. He has a darker scowl upon his face to-day than usual; I wonder what wickedness he is thinking about!’

‘Murder,’ responded Ellen with mock solemnity; then, remembering what she knew about the man, or thought she knew, and looking again at his really rather diabolical countenance, she regretted her levity. A cold shudder passed, too, over Florence. ‘Hush, Ellen; he positively does look very horrible.’

‘But, Florence, only suppose if the others don’t come home; we never can be left in the house alone with him, with no defenders except Mrs. Allwyne



and the maids. He'll murder us for having looked into his sketch'——

'Good afternoon, young ladies,' cried the West Indian, rudely approaching the window, and flattening his nose against it, unbecomingly, with the evident intention of making sure that there was no one in the apartment besides themselves. 'So we are to be all alone to-day, it seems; we must make ourselves the more agreeable to one another, must we not?'

'Sir?' exclaimed Florence haughtily, and justly incensed at the unaccustomed tone of familiarity which the young man assumed.

'You must make yourself extra agreeable to me,' repeated Luders in explanation, turning round upon his nose as upon an axis, so that it seemed wonderful that the plate-glass didn't break with the pressure, and cut it off—'that you must, both you and the other. We will have a very cozy evening, will we not?'

The hearts of the two young women began to beat very fast indeed; not by any means with satisfaction at the prospect of the coziness in question, but because it had dawned upon them simultaneously that Mr. Bartholomew Luders was a trifle the worse for liquor. 'I wish,' whispered Ellen to her sister, 'that even Carlo were here.'

Luders, whose unattractive face still adhered to the glass, caught the sound of this sentence without the sense. 'Carlo is with your two young men,' he said; 'with Marsden and the Model Pupil. They mean to come over the Weirdale Fells to-night.'

He gave such a devilish chuckle as he imparted this piece of information as made the blood of at least one of his auditors run cold.

‘How will they find their way?’ inquired Florence, with as unconcerned an air as she could assume.

‘They *won't* find their way. I am to put the lamp in the north passage-window,’ returned he grinning; ‘as if *that* was any good when the snow falls.’

‘They will never start in the snow?’ exclaimed Florence earnestly, forgetting her own cause for terror in the peril of others.

‘They will, though,’ cried Luders, nodding his head a great many times in malicious triumph. ‘Ryder is afraid of nothing, of nothing whatever, he says; consequently, he is not afraid of Death. With a lily-white winding-sheet of snow about him, he will look quite pretty, won't he? Ha, ha, that makes you pale, does it, Miss Florence? He will never live to be a baronet, then, by any accident—never have even a chance of making anybody “My Lady,” will he?’

Florence's face grew crimson as he spoke, but her eyes only bespoke contempt, not anger. Ellen sank into a chair, and hid her face within her trembling hands.

‘She is crying for the other,’ observed Luders, winking confidentially. ‘I should like to see *you* cry for Ryder. Do.’

Florence stood like a statue, only her rising colour betraying that she heard the insult; but with an unseen foot she beat the ground beneath her, as

though it were prostrate Fear, and she would keep him down.

‘Are you not hungry, Mr. Luders?’ said she. ‘*We* have dined’ (which was not strictly true, however), ‘but dinner shall be laid for you at once.’

‘Thank you,’ said he; ‘but you must dine with me, nevertheless. I can’t get on without female society: it is the atmosphere I breathe.’

‘Certainly, if you wish it,’ returned Florence; ‘we will sit down with you.’

‘All right,’ replied the gallant young man; ‘I do wish it;’ and with that he withdrew his nose from the window pane, and retired to his own apartment.

‘What have you promised?’ exclaimed Ellen, as soon as the dreadful face had disappeared from the spot which it had occupied like some badly framed and very uncomplimentary photograph. ‘I wouldn’t sit down at table with that man for worlds.’

‘Then I must dine with him alone,’ returned Florence quietly. ‘I must not break my word, and indeed there is no help for me anyway; for this evening he must be kept in good humour, and we may be sure that it is the last which he will ever pass at Teesdale How.’

‘I hope it may not be the last which *we* shall pass,’ said Ellen sobbing. ‘I do hope he will not murder us.’

‘Pooh, pooh,’ replied Florence laughing; ‘there is mighty Jane, the cook, to help us, and I will see she sharpens the kitchen-chopper. You go to your room until the bell rings, and then come down to dinner, or not, as you please.’

‘I would never leave you alone with the wretch,’ cried Ellen, throwing her arms round her sister’s neck—an action she always practised when in difficulties—‘but were ever two young women placed in so dreadful a position before?’

As soon as Florence was alone, she despatched by the hands of the fleet Elizabeth—who was directed to run all the way without stopping—a note to Mr. Brooklet, the clergyman, stating in forcible terms that she and her sister, being left alone in the house with female domestics only, were frightened at the idea of thieves, and begging of him to permit his man-servant to come at once, and pass the night at Teesdale How. Florence’s real opinion was that Luders was something more than intoxicated—that he was, in short, partly out of his mind; and subsequent events went to considerably strengthen that supposition.

At six o’clock, the dinner-bell rang as usual, and Mr. Luders, whom the interval seemed to have greatly sobered, took his seat at the table with his two young hostesses. His conversation was no longer impertinent; but whenever either of his fellow-pupils was mentioned, his face suffered a peculiar and horrible change. He did not attempt to conceal his satisfaction at their probable peril, and his malignity was the more repulsive to his present auditors, as, except on the occasion of the sketch-book *fracas*, they had never seen him exhibit any abhorrence of his companions before. Later in the evening, when they were in the drawing-room, where, on account of its northern aspect, the roaring

of the wind, and the thick soft thud of the snow, could be heard very distinctly, he grew quite maniacal in his endeavours to terrify the poor girls.

‘Did you not hear something in that last blast,’ cried he, ‘beside itself? Did you not hear a despairing shriek, as from some lost traveller, wearied out and dazed by the blinding snow? Was not that Carlo’s bark? Should you not send out somebody with a candle to look after two such nice young men?’ inquired he mockingly. ‘Elizabeth did not wait at table; perhaps you have sent her over to Weirdale after them. What a pity it is you have no man in the house!’

‘There is a man, thank you,’ replied Florence Bateman quietly, as she pulled the bell-rope twice. ‘Pray, do not think that we are solely indebted to you for protection this dreadful night. Richard,’ said she, as Mr. Allen Brooklet’s powerful man-of-all-work answered the summons, ‘please to bring in the tea.’

Sagacious Mrs. Allwyne had entered the room a few minutes before, upon pretence of some house-keeping matter, and given her young mistress to understand that help was come. The twice-rung bell had been the signal agreed upon for the unmasking of the battery—for the appearance of stout Richard Melbreak. Never was knight more welcome to distressed damsel, than was he to the two young ladies; and to the younger in particular, since her sister had not intrusted her with her plan, for fear of disappointment. The unpleasantly high spirits

of Mr. Bartholomew Luders became, on the contrary, proportionally depressed at his opportunity for annoying defenceless persons being so suddenly abbreviated. When the young ladies almost immediately afterwards announced their intention of retiring, he did not make any opposition; and after having brought up the drawing-room lamp, and placed it in the north passage-window, he himself retired to his couch.

The two sisters, although relieved from all apprehension on their own account, were by no means in a condition for speedily seeking sleep: the furious tempest which drove against their window-panes reminded them too forcibly of the peril of those exposed to its violence, and they knew enough of the hill-country in winter-time to understand the full extent of the danger. Before they went to bed, they had satisfied themselves of the light being in its promised position; but presently, through much talking of lost travellers on the snowy Fells, or through distrust of Luders, or through that vague sense of evil induced by surrounding circumstances, which is called presentiment, they began to imagine that the lamp had been removed. They did not mention the idea to one another, but each lay trying to battle with her own foolish apprehension, being fully convinced that the lamp had been properly placed, and knowing that no one could have taken it away without their knowledge, since the person would have had to pass and repass their chamber-door to do so. After a time the snow and wind abated, and that almost impenetrable darkness succeeded, which

was just then enveloping the maimed young man and his brave friend upon the extremity of Weirdale Fell; even in that comfortable chamber it seemed to make itself felt, and to give to the dying embers in the grate an unnatural lustre.

At last, and breaking a long silence, Florence whispered, with that disregard to logic which is peculiar to people in bed: 'Ellen, Ellen, are you asleep?'

'No,' replied the other young lady; 'are you? I can't get to sleep; I can't help thinking of *him*, do what I will.'

'Never mind him, darling; we shall not be plagued with him much longer, depend upon it.'

'I mean, I can't help thinking of poor Mr.—Mr.—Mr. Marsden, out on the Fells to-night.'

'I was thinking of that too,' returned Florence, neither surprised nor annoyed by her mistake, as she would have been in the daytime; 'and I can't get it out of my mind that that lamp is *not* in the passage—we surely ought to be able to see the light under the door.'

In an instant Ellen was out of bed, and had groped her way to it. She undid the bolt, and turned the handle with such care—for perfect noiselessness, however unnecessary, seems always to befit such occasions—that nothing was heard, even by herself, save the rapid beating of her own heart. Florence heard nothing at all. 'Why don't you open the door?' whispered she from the bed. 'Can you not find it?'

'It *is* open,' returned the other beneath her breath; 'the lamp *has* been taken away.'

It was horrible, in that dread waste and middle of the night, to feel the secret conviction that there was a murderer then abiding under their roof. They became, at once, as certain of Luders's intention to compass the death of his companions, as though they had seen him with slipperless feet and anxious eyes steal by their chamber-door, and remove the lamp that was to have been life itself perhaps to those for whom it was set. They even began to remember the exact time at which they had thought they heard his footsteps.

'What shall we do, Florence, dear? What shall we do?'

Florence's answer was the spurt of a match and the lighting of the tall toilet-candles. 'These may yet be in time,' said she gravely; 'we will put them in the place of the lamp.'

The two sisters in their long white night-dresses, each like some angelic acolyte with her lighted torch, hastened along the passage; but as they drew near to the north window, behold, there stood the drawing-room lamp as Luders had placed it, only that the lamp was out.

'Heaven forgive me!' cried Ellen, as she put her candle in its stead, 'but I really thought that Mr. Luders had taken it away. I never knew the lamp to behave so ill before.'

Florence took it up, and having examined it, inquired whether her sister knew when it had last been fed.

'I filled it full of oil myself,' replied she, 'this



very evening, so that the supply should not fail through the night.'

'Then is that man as wicked as we thought him to be,' returned Florence solemnly: '*the oil must almost all have been poured away before this lamp was set here!*'

## CHAPTER XIII.

## UNDER FOOT.

It was broad daylight before Ryder left Ladybank, and took his way to Teesdale How, not without much matter upon which to ponder on his road. Thankfulness for the escape of himself and Marsden upon the preceding night was largely mingled with indignation against Luders; the heartless trick which the West Indian had played them in exchanging the brandy for snow-water, on an occasion as he must have known, when the spirit might have been necessary to their safety, was bad enough; but besides that, Ryder could not help suspecting, although, of course, he had no knowledge of what had actually occurred, that even the lamp, upon whose light their very existence had depended, had been tampered with. Had it been set in the window at any reasonable time, he felt sure they must have seen it from the Fells earlier than they did; and although its sudden appearance, late as it was, did probably save at least one of their lives, he felt small gratitude to him who could procrastinate in such a perilous matter. Then, again, the invisible footstep upon the stair, which at a less eventful time would have entirely occupied his mind, sank into insignificance by the side of the astounding discovery of Phœbe Rosthwaite—a

living proof of the cruelty as well as profligacy of his foe. According to the poor girl's account, she had long ceased to entertain any other sentiment with regard to Luders than that of abject terror. She would have returned home long ago, and begged forgiveness of her father, but for the young man's threats.

He had, it seemed, often persuaded the foolish girl to fly with him, and the Rushbearing at Greendale had offered the best opportunity for this being carried into effect. Luders had well arranged his plans beforehand, and it must be confessed that Phoebe herself had exhibited no little duplicity and cunning. She had flirted with Marsden, in concert with Luders himself, while he, on his part, as we have seen, directed her father's jealous suspicions into the wrong channel. Luders's very quarrel with his fellow-pupil was premeditated; he had secretly followed the drunken miller and his daughter home, and in less than an hour was driving off with her to a distant town, whence she alone had taken a post-chaise to meet the night-mail at the nearest railway station, while he, in the meantime, returned to the How. She took her ticket to a large manufacturing town—a fact which in course of time transpired and set suspicion on a wrong scent—but got out at an intermediate station, whence, after one entire day, she returned unrecognised, and took up her abode at Ladybank. This place had been long fixed upon by Luders for the purpose, on account of its extreme loneliness, and the bad reputation which kept the country-folks away from it. Enough of provisions—

and, in particular, of strong drink for his own use—had been laid in to last his unhappy prisoner (as she speedily became) for a length of time; while even a small stove had been provided, without which, as the winter advanced, a residence at Ladybank would indeed have been insupportable. Certainly, never was erring mortal more immediately and severely punished than the wretched Phœbe. Almost at the very first Luders had rudely informed her that all his promises of providing her with a home, after a few weeks, and as soon as he should leave the How for good, as he expected to do, were false. He made little pretence of regard for his victim, when once in his power; but instead of affection, employed the more easily worked engine of fear. Fear, not so much should she venture to return home, of the opinions and conduct of her own associates—the harshness of whose sentiments towards her, however, he had greatly misrepresented and exaggerated—but of Luders himself. She was, in truth, in terror for her life. She rightly imagined that the man who could cruelly tyrannise over one who had given up all, however guiltily, for his sake, would hesitate at nothing—not even at murder itself; and besides this she had an additional reason for remaining quiet, which she confided to her two deliverers in a terrified whisper. She was firmly convinced, she said, that this man Luders was, under certain circumstances, a person not answerable for his own actions—in short, a temporary maniac. Under the influence of drink especially, his fury became either uncontrollable, or, if controlled, took the form of a

calm malignity more terrible and inhuman than any passion.

‘Do not tell, sirs—pray, do not tell, if you would have me live, and shameful and disgraced as I am, life is still dear to me,’ said she; ‘but though he doesn’t beat me, as my poor father did, he pinches me: see here!’

She bared her arm, white and shapely still, but not the plump arm Marsden had known it at the Greendale Rushbearing, and near the shoulder there was a black bruise, large as a crown-piece.

Ryder started up with a great cry of anger at the sight, and Marsden struck the floor with a blow so savage that it skinned his knuckles.

The whole scene was indeed truly melodramatic. The wretched but undeniably beautiful Phœbe pouring out her wrongs in that Robinson Crusoe apartment of hers, furnished with meats and drinks as if for a siege, to the two sympathetic young men, whom she besought with tears not to leave her until she was safe in her father’s hands; while the very dog looked up at her with attentive eyes, and only by the cock of one ear exhibited remembrance of what had occurred on the stairs so recently, and might occur again. With regard to that mysterious matter, Phœbe had heard nothing of it until the present night, or probably not even her terror of Luders would have detained her in the ruined house of Ladybank; exceedingly frightened by the occurrence, although she had only partially comprehended its nature, she had involuntarily screamed out, with the intention of appealing to the young men for

protection against the supernatural cause of fear, rather than against her mortal tyrant: and it was only afterwards, and when encouraged by their evident sympathy, that she was induced to confide to them her wretched story.

Thus it was that, leaving Marsden, whose ankle rendered him unable to move, to protect Phœbe, Ryder took his way to the How for help, with such a storm of indignation in him against Luders. 'Certainly if I met him now,' thought he, 'whether he were in his responsible state of mind or not, he should give me answers to a question or two. His fury and his malignity may be what they may, but it will be necessary for him to put up with a little beating.' If the lady in whose cause he felt so strong was not so faultless as those whose wrongs animated the knights-errant of old, they could scarcely have had a more determined cavalier than she. Presently he saw a crowd of people approaching him, principally dalesmen, to whom word had been sent by Florence of the non-return of the two young men, and who were about to scour the Fells in search of them; and following these came the young ladies themselves, with stimulants and such remedies as it occurred to them would be useful to half-frozen wanderers.

'I am so glad to see you, Mr. Ryder,' cried Florence hastily, as soon as they came up; 'but where is Mr. Marsden?'

Ellen did not speak, but her white face and restless eyes expressed a more intense emotion than any words could have done.

'He is safe and in shelter,' returned the young man rather sadly, for he read small joy in the fair girl's looks at his own security.

The blue eyes were gemmed at once with a grateful dew, and 'How tired you look!' and 'What a dreadful night you must have passed!' proclaimed at once that Love was at ease, and only tender Young Ladyism remained to be interested.

'They are at Ladybank,' stuttered Ryder, whose bashful nature was by no means equal to explaining all the circumstances of the case.

'*They!* Who is "they?"' cried Ellen. 'Do you call Carlo and Mr. Marsden *they?*'

'I mean Marsden and Phœbe Rosthwaite,' replied Ryder, with some relish of malice; but he was sorry when he saw Miss Ellen's cheek suffer such a change as might a rose which had become a peony. 'We had better not take so many people,' added he hastily; 'there need be only a couple of men to carry him.'

'To carry him!' repeated Ellen plaintively, and the peony in its turn changed into the whitest of lilies.

'To carry him!' repeated Florence wonderingly; 'and what do you mean about Phœbe Rosthwaite? Is she found?'

Hereupon the blundering, blushing youth had to recount what had occurred from first to last as succinctly as he could.

'And what is it you recommend?' asked Florence, in a tone of deepest pity, but in evident reliance on the simple-hearted young man's advice.

‘If you wouldn’t mind’—he answered hesitatingly, ‘you and Miss Ellen—I think it would be well for you to go up to the mill, and prepare the old man for his daughter’s coming: she will be best at home for the present.’

‘But will she be safe?’ asked Ellen.

‘I will answer for so much as that myself,’ replied Ryder quietly, but with such a gleam in his blue eyes as made Florence glad to be able to say ‘No’ to his next question, as to whether they knew where Luders was.

‘The dreadful man is gone out skating on the lake, we hear,’ said Ellen. ‘Oh, Mr Ryder, I wish you had been at home last night, for he almost frightened us into fits.’

‘Hush!’ said Florence hastily; ‘do not exaggerate, my dear: Mr. Luders has enough to answer for without *our* adding any accusation.’

‘He frightened you, did he?’ returned Ryder in the same grim quiet tone as before. ‘He seems to be fond of frightening women.’

‘Yes,’ cried Ellen impetuously! ‘and you may thank Florence and me that you saw the lamp at all last night, for he had poured out the oil from it.’

‘Mr. Ryder,’ said Florence earnestly, and drawing him aside, ‘may I ask a personal favour of you? You grant it? Thank you. It is that you will not seek Mr. Luders to-day, or speak with him, if you meet him.’

‘Why not, Miss Bateman?’

‘You know why not, without my particularising the reason,’ said she; ‘and you may thank me after-



wards for binding you so unhandsomely: and now, if you will return to Ladybank with these refreshments, and keep the people from seeing Phœbe, it will be well. We will wait at the mill until she comes.'

Ryder, whose natural obstinacy was not proof against a young lady's wishes, assented to this, although not without some reluctance; the least part of the hardship of returning was that he had had no rest for the last twenty-four hours, and was suffering still from the intense frost which had begun the night before to stiffen nature in her snow-shroud. What vexed him was, that he was prevented, by such an arrangement, from meeting with Luders, with whom he had a crow to pick that was by this time grown to be a buzzard. The truce, too, according to his tacit promise made with Miss Florence, was to last the whole of that day, and it was possible—though not very likely—that in the meantime his enemy might altogether escape. Having, therefore, discreetly gone on before to Ladybank, and persuaded Phœbe to withdraw herself secretly to the mill, he returned home, in very ill-temper, by the side of the crippled Marsden.

Mr. Onslow Bateman arrived at the How late that same evening, to hear most of the bad news with which every one in his little household was open-mouthed; so also did his daughters from the mill, with an account of the forgiving reception by her father—to procure which had caused them, however, many hours of entreaty and reasoning—of the unhappy Phœbe.

The one person whose coming was most dreaded, yet most looked for, of any, did not make his appearance. When the house was closed for the night, it still lacked one of its inmates, in the person of Mr. Bartholomew Luders. There was one individual only sitting up for him, who had been asleep half the day, for the especial purpose of keeping himself fresh for his coming, and even he could scarcely be said to be acting from motives of affection. Mr. Charles Ryder walked up and down his little dormitory, and stared out into the glittering moonlight from time to time with impatient mutterings, ever and anon breathing upon his fists in a ferocious manner, not so much to warm them, although it was intensely cold, as to keep them in condition for expected combat. The desire to slay Luders, which had at one time been really strong within him, had subsided during the last twelve hours to pommelling-pitch; but he knew that a letter to the West Indian's father, announcing his son's expulsion, lay sealed in the library below, and he was therefore extremely anxious to make the most out of what would be probably his last opportunity.

The next morning, however, the missing pupil being still absent, it was agreed upon all hands that he had withdrawn himself permanently from the polite amenities of Teesdale How.

Whatever unpleasant reflections concerning his disappearance may have beset the mind of Mr. Onslow Bateman concerned only his West Indian connection, and were restricted to himself alone. No other person of the household in the least regretted

the young man's departure; and save that his evil deeds proved the pretty frequent subject of conversation from bedroom to kitchen, the very memory of him began in the short space of two or three days to wane. Each went about his usual work or pleasure as though Mr. Bartholomew Luders had never been a sharer in either, and without one of those tender and regretful thoughts which a man, being absent, must have been vile indeed not to have earned for himself from those he has left behind. On the fourth day, which, like the rest, was one of intense frost, Ryder took his skates and leaving his still lame friend within doors, strode down to the lake. The ice was very smooth and clear as glass, for no snow had fallen on its own polished surface, which reflected the white mountains like a mirror on every side. On all that mighty sheet, Ryder was the one solitary skater, but the wintry echoes hailed him as though he had been half a score :

The leafless trees and every icy crag  
Tinkled like iron ; while far-distant hills  
Into the tumult sent an alien sound  
Of melancholy not unnoticed.

This unromantic young man was not so destitute of poetical feeling but that the sullen and solitary grandeur of the scene was impressed upon him in spite of himself. He strove to whistle a lively air, as if to assert his independence of any such influences, but the notes died away as soon as the indignant echoes would permit them to do so. He wished for a companion with whom to race along the glassy expanse,

or to explore the creeks and coves. Even the society of Luders, thought he, would be almost better than this utter solitariness. 'Remote, unfriended,' as he felt, he might have applied the rest of the line to his occupation, which seemed in truth both 'melancholy' and 'slow.' Suddenly, and as if to remove at least this last stigma, he started off at utmost speed, and gave his body to the wind, and let the banks on either side come sweeping by him; then, reclining back upon his heels—

Stopped short ; yet still the solitary cliffs  
Wheeled by him—even as if the earth had rolled  
With visible motion her diurnal round.

On one of these occasions, as he was hurrying along the centre of the mere, a human face flashed on him from below. At first, although it shocked him greatly, he concluded it to be the reflection of his own; but momentary as the glance had been, the impression produced by it was too strong to be satisfied by such an explanation, and he retraced his steps at once with less velocity. Though nothing at all resembling it could now be seen, the idea took firmest hold of his imagination. What an awful death for any one—for himself—thought he, would it be to be engulfed in that melancholy mere, while the cruel frost hastened to seal one up from one's fellow-creatures! What a lonely tomb would that vast lake be for a man with the grim mountains for gravestones, and the funereal fir-forests for his only mourners!

Whose face, then, was that face like, if it was not

the reflection of his own? Was it like any other man's he knew, or was it that of a mere water-kelpie, such as Michael Rosthwaite believed in? The associations which that name awoke resolved his doubts, and turned them into dreadful certainty. Yes, it was the face of Bartholomew Luders! His blood ran cold at the thought, for he had now no doubt of the reality of the horror. Over and over again he searched the track which he had last traversed, and at length he came to the face under his feet again. It could only be seen from a certain point, and that not immediately over it, but from thence it was perfectly visible, as through a thick glass-case. The cold stony eyes which he knew so well, were open as though in life, and wore an inexpressibly awful look. Death had come upon the wicked man unawares, indeed. The ice of the earlier part of the frost had evidently broken beneath the poor wretch, who had been unable to regain the hole through which he had fallen, and over which there was by this time stretched a new crystal curtain. The first thought of Charles Ryder, when the immediate terror of the thing was passed, was one of thankfulness to Florence Bateman for preserving him from having sought the blood of this man at the very time when he lay drowned in Teesdale mere, and God had taken his punishment into His own hand. The next instant, Ryder laid his cap reverently down to mark the spot where the dark face looked up at the sky, and sped across that no longer solitary mere for home and help.

## CHAPTER XIV.

## A COUPLE OF OFFERS.

THE death of Bartholomew Luders, and the scandalous disclosures consequent upon the return of Phœbe Rosthwaite to the mill, not only severed Mr. Onslow Bateman's West Indian connection, but severely injured his home prospects also. The Educational Profession is peculiarly subject to shocks of this description; a tutor, who may for any number of years have enjoyed the confidence of the whole world of Parents and Guardians, is not upon that account at all less liable to such visitations; and without himself becoming a Mohammedan, or running away with the rector's wife—accidents which happen but rarely—the Rev. Orthodox Pure may find himself almost at any moment, from circumstances quite beyond his own control, without pupils, and with his pedagogal scutcheon blotted for ever. Some young men are so very bad as to defy the best of systems,—and that of Mr. Onslow Bateman, as has been seen, formed no exception to this rule. Marsden and Ryder remained with him, indeed, but their continuance as pupils would of course become in time impossible, and meanwhile the aristocracies of rank and wealth intrusted their offspring to other fostering hands. These were the unhappy facts of the case; but it is by

no means to be supposed that Mr. Onslow Bateman betrayed so much, or indeed anything, by word, or deed, or manner. His airy grace might possibly exhibit some added charms through the unusual leisure accorded to its display, but as to any sign of uneasiness, far less anxiety, that he exhibited, it might be supposed that he had been furnished from the government grant devoted to Literature and the Fine Arts—which is not unaccustomed to succour persons very indirectly connected with those matters—with ample compensation for his lack of disciples.

But, alas! who of mortals, however highly set upon philosophic heights themselves, and above the ills which flesh is heir to, can prevent the tongues of others from flickering about their failing fortunes like flame about a tottering wall? When this, our story grows more tedious than common, can we stay the compositors' mockery as they set up the leaden pages? When one's wife and one's self have quarrelled, no matter under what prudentest circumstances of domestic privacy, is it not published on the house-tops when the maids retire to their sleeping-chamber in the attics? And because Mr. Onslow Bateman was politely indifferent to his own prospects, was Elizabeth, his parlour-maiden, to be equally so, to whom service was no inheritance, and whom it behoved, in case of calamity in the Bateman household, to look out for another place? If the mighty of this world did but know what was in the minds of their despised dependents, they would learn not only that they were no heroes to their

valets, but that they had very few secrets indeed from their occasional shoeblack.

It would perhaps have done Mr. Onslow Bateman's heart good—though certainly not in the proverbial sense of that expression—if he could have heard Richard Melbreak (Mr. Brooklet's man) conversing one morning with his cook-maid, Jane, upon his private affairs. The former, who was of a sporting turn, retained the customary straw in his mouth throughout the colloquy; and the latter conducted her part of the conversation with her chin curiously, and, one would have conjectured, painfully supported by one of the wooden spikes of the back-gate; but they knew all about 'the smash as, sooner or later, was likely to happen yonder to Thingumbob'—designating by a dirty thumb, in the Teesdale How direction, its unconscious proprietor—as well as he did himself.

As for Mrs. Allwyne, the housekeeper, she had sympathised with her dear young ladies again and again, regretting to herself that 'no more young nobbs seemed to be coming,' and yet reluctantly admitting that, 'after the goings on of that there Luders, that it was no such wonder neither.' Nor is it to be supposed that the two sisters were blind to the changed circumstances of their position, although they rarely made them the subject of their conversation; the sole outward change in them consisted in their becoming so considerably more attentive to their studies as to draw forth their father's pleasant banter upon such new-born diligence; while as for Miss Ellen's painstaking with the piano under the



tutelage of her skilful sister, he was, he said, quite at a loss to account for such a miraculous improvement. Singularly enough, Mrs. Allwyne was at no loss whatever, but explained it to the assenting Elizabeth in this wise; 'Poor, dear Miss Ellen, you see, she ain't like Miss Florence, who could get her own living at any time, let it be where 'twill; and so now she's a practysing on the pianny and such like, morning, noon, and night, for to be a governess, or what not, when the time comes.'

Lastly, Messrs. Marsden and Ryder were not behindhand in their knowledge of poor Mr. Onslow Bateman's private affairs, but discussed them quite calmly on a certain July afternoon as they paddled over the lake wherein Bartholomew Luders had found his wintry tomb some eight months back. Ryder was rowing, and Marsden lying in the stern, with a cigar in his mouth—their relative occupations not ill indicating their relative characters—as they held the following converse, broken only by the careless dip of the oar, or the soft crush of the keel among the lilies.

'What 'll the governor do when you and I leave him, Ryder?' said Marsden, after a long silence. 'I'm afraid he 'll have rather hard times of it.'

'That was what I was thinking,' replied the other gravely. 'I wish I had thirty thousand pounds or so, if it were only for the sake of him and his.'

'Would you make him a present of it?' asked Marsden drily, dropping the ash of his cigar over the boat-side into the water, and watching it dissolve with apparent interest; 'because, if you would, you

might just as well make one wish of it, and wish *he* had it at once; that is to say, unless you wish to put him under an obligation.'

'I don't know what I would do,' returned Ryder unheeding of the sarcasm, 'because I have not been tried. I suppose every poor wretch promises to himself the performance of generous actions, should he ever be blessed with riches'—

'Yes,' interrupted Marsden bitterly; 'and what is worse, he promises it to other people; then, if he gives five shillings a year in charity more than he did before, he imagines that he has "remembered the poor."' "

'I'm not thinking of quite that sort of benevolence,' replied Ryder; 'the asking one's friends to share one's good fortune is not, after all, such a very self-denying matter.'

'Not if they are one's female friends,' observed Marsden quietly; 'no.'

'I don't understand you,' returned Ryder angrily, meaning that he had understood him very much too well. 'Will you be so good as to explain yourself?'

'Tut, man, you mean to say that if you had thirty thousand pounds or so you would marry Ellen Bateman to-morrow,' answered the other impatiently. 'I see no necessity for delicacy between you and me in the matter,' continued he, tilting his straw-hat lazily over his eyes. 'I would marry her myself out of hand if I had half the money. But the great probability is, that we shall neither of us be able to afford the luxury.'

‘And yet you are an only son, are you not, Marsden?’

‘O yes. The whole estate (if there is any, which I very much doubt) will come to your humble servant, mortgages and all; and the property and myself will be pretty accurately represented, I reckon, by the mathematical expression, nought divided by one.’

‘Still, from what you have told me, you are sure of the affections of the young woman,’ argued Ryder gravely. ‘A woman’s true love is surely a great treasure.’

‘Metaphorically speaking, perhaps, my dear fellow; but practically, it is generally rather the reverse. I am sure I would not stand in her way, if any eligible young gentleman was to offer himself.’

‘No person of proper feeling would surely marry a girl under those circumstances, Marsden?’

‘Then there are a vast number of persons, and that in very good society, without it, that’s all I can say,’ returned the other laughing. ‘Your morality is severe enough, my dear Ryder, but your sentiment is positively beyond my horizon altogether. Let us go in. I heard the post-horn a little while ago, and perhaps there is news.’

Very slowly, and keeping a moody silence, Ryder pulled for the shore; he had been somewhat moved at the disregard shown to his own feelings by his friend at the beginning of their conversation, but that annoyance was now merged in his greater disgust at Marsden’s own low standard of what was becoming. It afforded, perhaps, the first glimpse to

the honest young gentleman of what he was to expect in the world which he was about to enter, and that from by no means the worst specimen of his fellow-men, and it gave him a shiver such as the bather experiences at his first plunge into the sparkling sea ; he had expected to have found it a great deal warmer.

Marsden, with his hat still over his eyes, being but an indifferent pilot, and Ryder thinking of anything but the work he had in hand, the prow of the shallop glided, before they were aware, into a soft substance, which turned out to be Mr. Onslow Bateman's hand.

'One might have told this was a hired boat, and not your own property, young gentlemen, at a great distance off,' observed the Tutor gravely ; 'but for me, the rock must have knocked a hole in her. I do hope that, in after-life, you will keep a better look out for breakers ahead.'

There was such an unusual seriousness in Mr. Bateman's countenance, that Marsden, without replying to this remark, could not forbear asking whether there was anything the matter.

'There's some sad news come by post,' replied the Tutor, 'which concerns our friend Ryder here. Would you take the oars, please, Marsden, while I have a few minutes' conversation with him.'

'My dear Ryder,' continued he, as soon as they were alone, 'you have experienced a sad loss in the death of your only brother.'

The young man's face grew ashy pale, not because of grief, but because he felt the tears too far from his eyes.

For once, Mr. Onslow Bateman misunderstood his man. 'This is a heavy blow, I see, but you must bear it bravely. To the Young, Death is always strange; and when it occurs to those near and dear to them'—

'No, sir, it is not that,' returned Ryder, frankly; 'I sincerely wish it were. I reproach myself, rather than regret my father's son. How did he—that is—it must have happened very suddenly?'

'He died of apoplexy, poor fellow, in a few hours; but there was little suffering. He was a thorough country gentleman, and will be missed by a very large circle of friends. It will be necessary that you start for Rudesleigh Manor at once, Sir Charles.'

The unaccustomed title struck more strangely on the ear than all the rest. It reminded him at once of the vast change that had occurred in all his circumstances, and pressed him to put those thoughts in action, now, while opportunity offered, which he had but lately entertained only as a pleasant dream.

'Sir Charles!' said he. 'I trust, Mr. Bateman, you will not call me by that name a second time. Our relative positions of Tutor and Pupil will very soon cease, but I hope only to make us something more to one another than we have hitherto been.' The young man was thinking only of friendship, but the instant he had spoken, he felt what we trust no lobster feels when he finds himself for the first time in hot water—the terrible sensation of growing scarlet in spite of one's self. Mr. Onslow Bateman

placed his hand upon his pupil's shoulder, and said in a tone that was not his customary one: 'You have a good heart, my dear Ryder, an excellent heart;' then added with a sigh: 'The heart and the digestion are two things that are always in their greatest perfection about the period of adolescence.'

'Sir,' replied the young man simply, 'I know that Time tries all things. Meanwhile, you must believe me when I say that my greatest satisfaction at present—so great that I speak of it when I should only speak of sorrow—in this altered state of my prospects, is, that it affords me the opportunity of being permanently useful to you and yours.'

'Sir Charles Ryder'—began the Tutor coldly.

'Not so, Mr. Bateman,' interrupted the young man with passionate energy; 'pray, pray do not misunderstand me, and wrong yourself thus cruelly. I know the liberty I take, and with whom I take it; it pained me more than it pleased me to thus address you, for I know'—poor Ryder, whose eloquence had been hitherto miraculous, and such as greatly to astonish himself, here fairly lost all inspiration—'for I know, as everybody knows, what a confoundedly proud fellow you always are.'

There was luckily a stump of a tree close by, which afforded Mr. Onslow Bateman an indifferent seat, or else it seemed possible that he must have descended to the ground itself, and there had his laugh out. The Teesdale woods had certainly never echoed to the mirth of their temporary proprietor so heartily before; he did not hold his sides, because it was impossible that a gentleman of his breeding

should indulge in such a vulgar precaution, but it would unquestionably have been a very great relief to him if he had ; he laughed till the tears ran down his cheeks, he laughed till he was sore, nor was the quality of his mirth inferior to the quantity, for his laughter was as the laughter of those who win.

‘ I will not be “so confoundedly proud” any more, then, Ryder,’ said he, as soon as he could speak ; ‘ you must, I am sure, have been very much in earnest to behave so disrespectfully as that.’

‘ We two, then, are henceforward friends enough,’ replied the delighted baronet, ‘ to have no thought, and far less word of Obligation, on either side ?’

‘ If you will have it so, my dear Ryder ; yes,’ responded Mr. Onslow Bateman, in a tone of a man who confers a favour gracefully.

The young man hastened to his chamber to prepare for immediate departure, with feelings which, we fear, were strangely at variance with the immediate object of his journey. That he was glad of Sir Harry’s death was far from being the case, for if the peril of his own life could have saved that of his brother, he would have willingly risked it ; but Death had come, bringing with it so great a crowd of attendant images, that the chief figure in the procession—his brother only in name—was scarcely visible. When he did look with his mind’s eye, upon its silent features, he was smitten, as we have said, with self-reproach at his own immobility ; but the real sorrow which now possessed his heart in secret was born of that reflection to which he had himself given utterance in the morning—‘ No person

of proper feeling would surely marry a girl under those circumstances!' for the circumstances of which he spoke had become his own.

If it be not true that we are not altogether displeased at the misfortunes of our friends, it must at least be conceded that we rarely delight in seeing them suddenly prosperous; that it always seems uncommonly hard that Jones should win that Derby lottery, wherein we ourselves draw only a non-starter. Marsden first indignantly dismissing from his mind a transient idea that he himself might have deserved less well of Providence, considered Ryder's good-fortune as little less than a personal grievance, and certainly entertained a meaner opinion of his friend in consequence. 'Those dull dogs are always the lucky ones,' was his reflection, wherein there lurked a considerable self-complacency; 'I wonder when *I* shall ever turn up such an honour as this fellow has done;' and, indeed, the prospects of Mr. Robert Marsden jun., it must be confessed, were looking far from well. The same week that gave Ryder his brother's property, brought to himself the tidings of his father's hopeless ruin. The extravagant squire was only saved from a prison by the sacrifice of all he possessed, and all his son had counted on possessing after him. The thousand pounds bequeathed to him through his mother—whom the paternal side of his house had once looked down upon, on account of her poverty—was all that now remained to the heir of the Marsdens. Only one thing besides was



left to him untouched, and even increased by adversity—his personal pride; and out of it sprung up at once, strong and vigorous, like a young tree among ruins, the determination to leave that country where his companions would be henceforth more than his equals.

He took his way, with his evil tidings in his pocket, up that same beck where we first met with him some twelve months before, to mature his plans, as he would have said, but in reality to brood over his misfortunes. How different was that heavy step of his by the brook-side, from the lithe leaps with which he had formerly sprung up the river-bed! It had already grown slow and plodding, as befitted one who had to make his own uphill way in the world. When he arrived at the great rock whence all the glories of that home-landscape could be seen, he sat him down among the purple heather, and gazed till his eyes grew dim. That scene had never before been so dear to him as now, when he was looking on it perhaps for the last time. He was bidding farewell not only to it, but to all the circumstances which, to one of his character, made the face of nature fair and grateful. He had no satisfaction in the thought that he was about to behold, in another hemisphere, scenes incomparably grander and more magnificent. Leisure, competency, troops of friends, the absence of carking cares—all these were necessary to his enjoyment of such sort of pleasure, and he had lost them in all probability for ever. His delicate sensuous nature was keen enough to feel this thoroughly, while its egotism made his

wretchedness without remedy. Even the flutter of a well-known dress between the trees, telling of the approach of one, herself perhaps about to wage a more unequal battle with the world than he, did but turn into another channel the thoughts which still flowed on in the strong stream of Self. She was in his eyes only a new sacrifice, which Fate and the Jews were compelling him, through his father's fault, to make. And yet he loved Ellen Bateman better than any other person in the world, save Robert Marsden, and she read it in his looks as she drew near; nor even had she known that exception in his own favour, is it probable that she would have been otherwise than satisfied.

'What brings *you* out so far this morning, Miss Ellen?' asked he smiling. 'I hope I have not taken possession of your oratory?'

'I merely came to see as much as possible of a very favourite spot, before I leave it,' returned she. 'But a few more months, and then we are never more to see dear old Teesdale How again, it seems.'

'But a few more months! Why, your father's lease is not nearly out yet, Ellen, surely? Whither are you going?'

'To Rudesleigh Manor,' answered the young girl faintly, and hanging down her head.

'To Rudesleigh!' cried Marsden impetuously. 'Why, this is quick work indeed. Sir Charles lets no grass grow under his worshipful feet.' Then added in a low soft voice—a very excellent thing with women—'And is this pleasing to you, Ellen? Do you like this visit to the fire-new baronet?'

‘No, Mr. Marsden; I do not.’

‘Call me, Robert,’ said he tenderly, and taking her trembling hand in his, ‘since I am he who loves you better than any living man, but who has also about as little as any man to offer you beyond his love. Call me Robert, if it be but for once; for I, too, am going away, across the world, Ellen, to seek that fortune which here only falls to dullards.’

The poor girl would have fallen, but that the young man had judiciously anticipated that contingency by encircling her waist with his arm. ‘Australia is far, far away, Ellen, and there are the chances of land and sea,’ continued he pathetically, and indeed he felt all that he was expressing concerning those disagreeables: ‘it may be I shall never see you more, dearest; it may be I shall return an old and objectionable-looking individual’—his bright eyes laughed as he spoke and reflected her own incredulous gaze, for the imagination of youth, however lively, can never picture to itself the reality of growing old—‘and, in short, my own,’ (his voice sunk and his eyelids drooped as he came to this sad conclusion) ‘it will be better, fairer, more unselfish, if I say, “Forget me: choose some other, more prudent, more prosperous than I”’ (the dog was kissing the falling tears away at the very moment he hinted himself unprosperous); ‘for indeed, my darling, I am dreadfully afraid that I am but a sad scamp after all, and quite unworthy of you.’

Robert Marsden made this last confession quite penitently, and out of the fulness of his youthful heart; but had he been Machiavelli or Ovid himself,

he could not have uttered an avowal more judicious and favourable to his own interests. When a young lady is left to make her matrimonial choice out of two individuals, she is almost positively certain to select the wrong one; but when the latter assures her with his own lips—let alone the kisses—that he *is* the wrong one, and not by any means a safe sort of person to be connected with, his victory is secure. If Robert Marsden were poor—so Ellen reasoned—there would be the greater opportunity for her being a source of comfort to him; if he were self-exiled, so much the more in a foreign land would he need to think upon some true love at home; and if he were a scamp, oh, then, what a labour of love to her would be the delightful operation of reclaiming him! The circumstances, in short, being in every way unpropitious, the two young people got there and then betrothed.

## CHAPTER XV.

## SHIFTS.

LET no supersensitive Reader shudder at the title of this chapter, for the matter of it, although disrespectful, is very far from being indelicate. It treats merely of those contrivances which those who have little money employ to get more, and those who have no money adopt in order to live. Robert Marsden is at present in the former category; out of his thousand pounds of fortune, or rather out of the eight hundred pounds which represented it in consequence of his anticipating his majority, he has some thirty-five pounds in gold remaining; which he wears, less uncomfortably than when it was a greater sum, sewed into the waistband of his breeches, over which a loaded revolver is on constant sentry-duty. The rest has gone in various purchases which he was assured in London were indispensable to Australian existence—among which is an excellent galvanising apparatus—and which in Australia, he is convinced, would have been far better left in London. He also lost a little on the voyage out, at a very remarkable game at cards, of colonial origin, called Yosh. After landing at Melbourne, he had lived indifferently enough at a small lodging-house at about three times the rate which his Covent Garden hotel had cost him before start-

ing from home. Since he arrived at the Diggings, where we now find him, a digger of two months old, he has been copiously bleeding gold from his waist-belt to supply himself with the most ordinary necessaries of life; working hard as a railway navvy; sleeping under canvas—for with misplaced acquisitiveness he had sold his iron-house, his one good home investment, for five times its cost; and dreaming the most disappointing dreams of regretted England. Often and often as he spat upon his hands preparatory to taking up the wheel-barrow handles (which was one of the few leisure moments vouchsafed to him for reflection), he curst the day that brought him over seas to that antipodes where everything was upside-down indeed; where convicts were magistrates; gold-diggers, men about town; servants, masters; and young gentlemen with the Marsden blood in their veins, little better than mudlarks—nay, worse indeed, since mudlarks were understood to enjoy their occupation, which was very far indeed from being the case with him.

Two months and a half had he and some nineteen of his fellow-countrymen been working in a perhaps Pactolean but certainly tawny stream, and not one bit of gold had they yet discovered. They occupied a plateau at the foot of a vast rock, over which the river was precipitated some hundred and twenty feet; and beneath, and between them and the plain, was another cataract. Gold had been found in the bed of the stream above where the granite was what is called 'soft' or rotten, but not below, where it was hard; so that it was an even chance that it should

be found midway on the plateau, although other gangs of diggers, who had so reasoned, had been deterred by the labour of the undertaking from trying their luck. The party of Robert Marsden, however, besides being numerically strong, were sanguine—being composed chiefly of new-comers—and they had at last completed, after enormous labour, a new channel whereby the waters should be drained off immediately below the foot of the first cataract, and the golden treasure be left bare, or at least attainable. It was determined to tap the river on the ensuing morning, and in the meantime eight of their number kept guard, by fours, over the precious channel; it being judged possible that they might be anticipated even during the night by some who had not been working ten hours a day for ten weeks, but who, cuckoo-like, preferred to take advantage of the labour of others. Never had river in the most mythological times a stranger set of guardians. The old category of ‘soldier, sailor, tinker, tailor, gentleman, apothecary, plough-boy, thief,’ pretty exactly described their different professions, our hero of course being the gentleman. The thief—a *valet-de-chambre*, who was an extremely clever fellow, and had picked up some magnificent phrases from his last master, through whose good offices he had also been transported—and Marsden, were most heartily tired of the job, and took a far less cheerful view of what was likely to come of it than their two companions.

‘I wouldn’t take five hundred pounds for my share of the profits,’ quoth the apothecary, at the

close of a stormy debate upon this subject, and beating the ground with his pistol-but, in his impatience of contradiction, as though it were a pestle and mortar.

'Perhaps you'll *give* five hundred pounds for mine,' inquired Robert sneeringly; 'you may buy me off for that money this very moment—if you happen to have it about you.'

The notion of the poor ragged half-starved enthusiast having such a sum in his possession, was as ludicrous as would have been the implication of wealth to his prototype in *Romeo and Juliet*, and produced a roar of laughter.

The plough-boy, who had recently emigrated from Wiltshire, where his acquaintance with the indications of the presence of auriferous quartz must have been limited, backed the apothecary, however, in his good opinion of their location. He hoped, and expressed the hope, that he should soon be 'up to his neck in golden guineas.'

'That is not precisely the form in which the metal is excavated,' observed Marsden drily; 'and before it attains that shape in this charming country, it is usually stolen from one.'

The apothecary and plough-boy both remarked, with expletives, that they would like to see any man attempting to deprive them of their private property.

The thief said nothing, but determined in his own mind to gratify them in this respect in case of their acquiring anything worth his while to steal. Nevertheless, the four, who were as well assorted as any among their miscellaneous band, agreed to stick



together in case of failure; the loadstone of attraction being the few remaining guineas which Marsden alone, of all the adventurers, yet carried round his loins.

Presently—while the snow yet fell, and the night winds blew about the turrets of Rudesleigh Manor, winterly—the Australian summer-morning broke in warmth and music, and out from their dingy tents came pouring forth the other proprietors of this yet untouched Golconda. Unkempt, unshaven men, wonderfully assimilated to one another by this time through their visible admission into the common guild of vagabondism; roving blades, indeed; hatchet-faced, with features just now sharpened on the whetstone of needy expectation, they eyed the sparkling waters greedily, as though their gleam had been the earnest of the riches hid below. The whole nineteen were there, all actuated by one passion, the getting of gold, which had, however, a different attraction for each.

To most of these emigrants, who were of the better class, the primary and most longed for benefit which wealth was to confer, was the means of reconveying them to the old country; to others, whom certain penal enactments prevented from this course, it promised a fair field and no *disfavour*, which certainly had scarcely been granted to them in England, where crime had been almost their heritage; to many again—and these for the most part professional diggers who, one would have thought, should have known the evil of such a fluctuating existence—it held forth the delights of ‘a spree’ in Melbourne of a month, or at the most six months’ duration, at

the end of which were hard work, demi-starvation, and digging again; and these last exhibited by no means less anxiety than the tailor himself, who trusted to return to his far-away wife and her six children, with a little fortune—or than the apothecary, who fervently hoped that what he might gain would long save him from the necessity of going back to his spouse in Sydney, a hard-working letter of lodgings, with whom he was accustomed dutifully to live when he could not help himself.

With Robert Marsden, recklessness had in some measure already supplied the place of philosophy. He had been so hardly used by Fortune of late, that he had mighty little trust in her, and judged it would only be like one of the jade's tricks if she made a fool of him upon this occasion. Still, his heart-thuds quickened not a little when the pick being inserted in the thin earthen barrier which alone separated the new and lower channel from the river below the fall, the waters rushed through it like a mill-race, leaving the main bed at once open to investigation, although still occupied by a considerable stream. A few men being told off to dam this current up with mud and gravel, the rest rushed down into the half-emptied torrent, like drunken soldiers to the sack of a town that has long withstood their efforts. There were many minutes of total silence after the first plunge, save for the splash of spades, and other digging instruments, but it was at last broken by an awful oath from a gigantic digger. His practised pick was not to be deceived by the false juggler Hope—the river-bed

was as hard as adamant; and he expressed his opinion of the merits of 'Half-way Fall' as a gold station, in a manner which, had such been within hearing, might have distressed a delicate ear, and which certainly left no mischievous doubt of the real state of the case even in the mind of the most sanguine.

So unsatisfactory had been the investigations of every man into the granite or dark-grey shale which formed the solid portion of the river-bed, and such confidence had each in the corroboration thus afforded by one of so great experience, that the whole band began to wade to shore again, there to remain until at least the search should be rendered less inconvenient by the further diminution of the stream, and anathematising the unpromising spot in every term of reprobation that the combined slang vocabularies of the mother-country and her colonial dependency could furnish. But a little before, and their eyes seemed to have no vision for anything but the golden mirage which had since so cruelly deceived them, but now they glared at one another with passion more dangerous than their former selfishness, as though they were ready to avenge on man the disappointment inflicted on them by nature. At this moment, in the black silt and filth of the river, so inimical to the hopes of the gold-finder, the poor pickpocket was seen struggling vainly, and sinking as he struggled into a living tomb; but no man offered him assistance. His screams, in spite of the roar of the cataract, could be distinctly heard, but no voice was raised in reply save that of the gigantic digger.

'You be quiet, Master Nimblefingers,' exclaimed he, 'and know when you're well off, will you! You've got no gold, it's true, but after a minute or two you'll not be in the way of wanting it, and therefore you're a lucky fellow.'

It is probable that all the despairing creature caught of this heartless speech was the word 'gold;' and that talismanic word seemed to bestow upon him a superhuman energy even in the very jaws of death.

'I *have* gold!' shrieked he, holding up a tolerably sized nugget in his hands, which the lateral pressure of the mud kept above his head; 'here is gold for all of you, and to spare.'

In an instant, as though impelled by some shock of nature, a dozen men, with the digger himself foremost, plunged once more into the flood. Almost heedless of their own danger, they approached the sinking wretch, whose head and arms were now alone visible above the surface, and by means of transverse planks maintained themselves upon the yielding substance, while they extricated their half-dead companion, and brought him to *terra firma*. What an interest was now felt concerning this fellow-creature, whose destruction they had so lately been calmly contemplating! How did he find it? Where did he find it? Not in that black silt, surely?

'No, not there,' replied poor Nimblefingers very faintly, 'certainly not there; it was in some gravel above the shale on the other side, and I was trying to cross over yonder, to tell you of it, and got in,

when,' added he, with a peevishness that evoked a general smile, 'you were all so kind and prompt in your assistance.'

This news being fairly obtained, the retailer of it again lost his attraction, his auditors at once crossing by the dam to the spot on the other bank where he had made his golden discovery.

Marsden alone crossed not, but remained with the fortunate thief, who, encased in a tight-fitting garment of a sort of 'Oxford mixture' of pipe-clay and vegetable matter, did not, nevertheless, by any means look the type of good luck and easy circumstances.

'Master Nimblefingers,' observed the young man grimly, 'do you know that they Lynch in these parts pretty frequently? I recognise that nugget to be one I myself bought at Melbourne.'

The thief would have thrown himself at the other's knees, but that he motioned him fiercely to remain where he was, and in silence. 'Fool,' cried Marsden, 'would you bring back the whole band of fiends upon you with your antics? You were right enough, man, to tell a lie to save your life, although you would not save it long if that hulking digger yonder should guess how you tricked him. He had his joke upon you when you were smothering, and now it's your turn to laugh at him—that is, when you get clear out of the wood. It was a capital dodge of yours, the notion of finding gold in such a mud-swamp. But the nugget being mine—thank you, yes, I think restitution is the least you can do in such a case—may I ask where did you steal it from? Pshaw, man,

don't prevaricate with *me*; was it from this breast-pocket, or from out of my knapsack as I slept?'

'That was just it,' responded the discomfited Nimblefingers, whose real name before he took to *aliases* was Miles Ripon; 'it was taken out of your knapsack.'

'Good!' exclaimed Marsden bitterly; 'sleep, it now seems, is one of the luxuries which a man has to part with in this favoured country if he would hold his own. Now, look you, my talented friend, I am a dull fellow, it is true, and must needs sleep; but if ever again I lose one farthing in your company, I shall know at once whose brain to send a bullet through.'

He tapped his revolver, and the other nodded contentedly. 'I am too grateful to you, sir, as it is,' returned he grinning, 'to put you to any such trouble. I know that any other man here would have had me Lynched.'

'I hope you feel as you say,' replied Marsden coldly; 'but I can't say that I believe you. You and I, and those two who kept watch with us, if they be still willing to cast in their lot with us, must be off to-night to Melbourne. It is no use to stay by a gold river that only reproduces one's own nuggets. For my part, I'm sick of digging. I have still over thirty pounds remaining—at least, if I haven't, they must be in your pocket—and they will go further among four than among nineteen. We will take that light cart of mine, and be off by moonrise.'

'By all means,' observed Ripon coolly; 'but you

know we have not got a horse, sir. That last load of planks for this embankment here well-nigh broke your mare's back. But I will get a horse if you will write the certificate.'

'Certificate!' cried Marsden peevishly; 'I don't know what you mean. I forgot about the poor mare altogether. How far is it to walk to Melbourne?'

'About a hundred miles or so,' returned the other; 'mostly long grass, and the rest of it mud and ruts. It would certainly be much better to write the certificate. People steal horses so perseveringly in this country, that when you buy one you get a deed of transfer from the last owner to account for your possession of it; the colonial character being, one regrets to say, suspicious in the extreme. There is a horse just fifteen miles up-stream here which would just suit us. I've ink and paper in my tent, and can dictate the description, since others, and even myself, have a difficulty in deciphering my own handwriting. I dare not bring it down without a certificate, or I would not trouble you.'

'I don't at all like it,' observed Robert Marsden, Esq., late of Marsden Hall, scratching his head. 'Of course we shall send it back again; but still even the borrowing an animal under such circumstances is peculiar. I really don't half like it.'

'You can't possibly tell that unless you have seen it,' observed his new ally, affecting to misunderstand his meaning; 'and as to any scruples about'——

'Yes, that is just it, Master Nimblefingers,' interrupted Marsden, smiling in spite of himself.

‘Oh, well sir, if you have the least fancy against temporarily annexing the animal, you know they can have that beautiful bay mare of yours in the meantime.’

‘Very true,’ said Marsden gravely; ‘that will be exchange and no robbery, will it not?’

‘A mere exemplification of barter, sir,’ returned the other composedly, ‘without which commerce would languish, and the intercourse of nations might just as well be discontinued.’ With which euphuistic sentiment Miles Ripon put Robert Marsden’s certificate into his pocket, and started up the river-bank to steal a horse for him.

It was dim moonlight when our two adventurers started in their untaxed cart, with the horse dedicated without permission to the drawing of it, from the top of the eastern river-bank towards Melbourne. Neither the apothecary nor the plough-boy could be prevailed on to accompany them by any argument short of that very strong one which they dared not use concerning the stolen nugget. The retreat had long been sounded to the great army of diggers, and silence reigned over the universal camp as they drove along. Rest, however, was banished from at least one of the indwellers of almost every tent; and wherever the lights gleamed through the canvas more whitely even than the moonbeams themselves, there watched some wary digger over his sleeping comrades and their hard-earned gains, with weapon ready to his hand. The ground in the ravine, and behind them, was a mere upturned chaos, as if a thousand giants had been pushing Titanic ploughs



in all directions blindfold, as English rustics race with wheel-barrow at village feasts. Before them was the unmade or bush road, sometimes good enough, but in that part resembling a boundless grass-field over-ripe for cutting, with unseen stones at the roots, of which their cart-wheels were the first to receive intelligence, and their shaken bones the second.

It was during a shock more terrible than usual from one of these boulders, that Miles Ripon uttered a cry of very undisguised alarm, and clung to his companion's neck so as nearly to throttle him exclaiming that there was a rattlesnake in the cart with them.

'There is certainly a boa constrictor,' replied Marsden coolly, disengaging himself with his unoccupied hand; 'and there is also a little box of tools.'

'A box of tools!' cried the other in a tone of great relief, 'you would have saved me a miserable minute if you had let me into that secret. But are you a carpenter, sir? and do you know what a box of tools, to a man who can use 'em, in this country is? It is better than a strong box filled with money. It's bread, and meat, and pudding, and a house over your head wherever you go.'

'That's thorough Australian,' responded Marsden savagely; 'all blossom, and promise, and fine words. Now, please to give us a halfpenny worth of brimstone to mix with all that treacle. What are the drawbacks to going into the carpentering line?'

'There are none,' returned Ripon briskly—'there are absolutely none; but with every mile you approach Melbourne, remember, you are decreasing the value of this property. There's Marycross Station, ten miles west of this, a large village, where every window-frame comes from sixty miles away; but perhaps you have friends in town, and a better line chalked out for you?'

'I have no friends anywhere except you, my honest fellow,' replied Marsden bitterly, and with a sneer upon the concluding adjective.

'Look here, sir,' answered Nimblefingers, with some dignity; 'never insult a man as means well by you; it ain't worth the little gratification you derive from it, in comparison with the harm you do yourself—it ain't indeed. Now, I should never have thought of reminding you that you were a gentleman *once*.'

The Marsden blood rushed to the face and forehead of the young man as he heard these words, and he uttered a smothered execration.

'There you see, sir, *you're* hit now, and you know how it feels,' continued Nimblefingers; 'you've come down and I've run up the ladder—for I don't mean to thieve any more, I don't indeed—and now we have met on the same round, so let us agree. You've saved my life, sir, and don't suppose a man forgets that in a hurry because he ain't a swell. What I suggest is, that we make tracks for this Marycross—which is a sheep-station in the neighbourhood of diggings—and there set up together in the building and carpentering line. I'm a good hand at learning,

as they always said at the thieves' school in Whitechapel. This horse, which might else bring us into trouble, can be sent back from there as a strayed beast; it's a capital going animal too,' added Miles pathetically, as he regarded the black's fine muscular action; 'but this is one of those peculiar cases, I suppose, wherein that beautiful remark which I remember to have inscribed in my copy-book before I went to the Whitechapel Academy, must be our guide—Honesty is the best Policy.'

'I quite agree about sending back the horse, and tearing up this certificate, to possess which is like carrying about one's own death-warrant,' replied Marsden; 'but I am no builder, nor, for that matter, carpenter either; I have only knocked a few things together sometimes for my own amusement, when I was a lad.'

'That's the great pull you gentlefolks have over us in your education,' responded the thief. 'I have been a valet all my life, and never taught myself in my leisure hours anything useful. Why, there was a young swell in Melbourne yonder, who came out a ruined spendthrift, and who now makes five thousand a year as a livery-man. He could ride, you see, like a scenter.'

'Like a what?' interrupted Marsden, innocently imagining that his town-bred companion was confusing the office of the fox-hunter with that of the fox-hound.

'Like a scenter, sir—one of those chronological characters, half-men and half-horses—and he was rough-rider to the most vicious animals that came

into town, until he became so necessary that one of the principal horse-dealers took him into partnership, and now he is at the top of the tree. Here's the turning, sir, I spoke of, to the West; now, which shall it be? Melbourne or Marycross?'

'Hanged if I know!' cried Marsden, irresolutely, and causing the sable steed to slacken his pace. 'I must say I prefer something like civilisation to the utter savageness of the life we have been leading lately.'

'Very well, sir, broadcloth in rags rather than decent homespun—just as you like. One is more likely to meet any old English faces who may be coming over, to be sure; that's one great advantage in Melbourne, isn't it?'

Marsden, who had just slowly passed the turning, brought the horse up to a dead-stop at this remark.

'Suppose we toss, now,' suggested Ripon; 'heads for Melbourne, tails for the settlement; luck always decides what is best for us.'

'Toss then, by all means,' cried Marsden savagely; 'if you have got a coin to toss with, and so let it be.'

The copper arbiter of two men's destinies sprang deftly into the air from the thief's elastic thumb, and after twittering, like lark wings in the ether, came down upon the cart-boards, tremulous, as a ballet-dancer finishes her pirouette.

'It's woman!' exclaimed Marsden.

'Yes, it's Miss Mary Cross,' cried the other, laughing; so the big black horse had to be backed a little, and turned into a dim cart-track, leading up into the western hills. The pair did not utter a

word, except when a jerk more violent than ordinary extorted an exclamation, for several miles—Miles Ripon being apparently sufficiently amused with his own thoughts, for a sly smile often crossed his countenance, and Robert Marsden immersed in as engrossing if less agreeable reflections. At last the latter, in a more cheerful tone than he had yet used, broke silence, as the white tents and wooden huts of a pastoral station came into view, pitched upon one of those rich natural clearings peculiar to Australia. ‘Well, friend, I am glad we came here, whatever comes of it: a decision once arrived at saves us a world of doubts and perplexities. Besides, we cannot reproach one another now, since the affair has been decided for us. There is certainly nothing like trusting to Providence, and tossing, whenever one has to make choice of one of two courses.’

‘Nothing, except making sure beforehand,’ responded Nimblefingers with a chuckle, and exhibiting the decisive penny to his astonished companion. ‘You see it’s got two tails, one upon each side, and therefore had a reasonable chance of not coming up ‘heads’ in any case. By that means I made Marycross pretty certain.’

Marycross Station might have been taken for a village green in England—only upon an unusually extensive scale—whereon tents and wooden booths were pitched in anticipation of a fair or races. There was no house, indeed, so comfortable and compact upon it as those upon wheels, which belong to the ‘Cheap Jacks’ and photographic establishments in the old country; and the ‘Hotel’ itself—

a canvas one—would have looked small indeed compared with any of the peripatetic ones upon Ascot Heath on the Cup-day. Nevertheless, to our two sleepless travellers it presented an aspect promising enough; and having arranged with caution, and at no slight cost, the retransmission of the strayed black horse to its rightful owners, they enjoyed upon iron bedsteads—the bedding of which expressed the scarcity and dearness of water in the locality—the sleep of those who have made their peace with their fellow-men. After a few hours' repose they breakfasted; and after having paid about half a sovereign each for the refreshment—fresh eggs, for one item, being a shilling apiece in that pastoral district—set out to seek for a tenement in which to inaugurate, like another Martin Chuzzlewit and Company, their architectural firm. Marsden was for taking a little tent at the moderate rate of three guineas a week; but his companion overruled him, representing with some reason that an architect under canvas would be placed in a similarly anomalous position to a bald man who should devote his energies to the complete restoration of the human hair. So they entered upon the occupation of a log-hut (whose proprietors were migrating further up the country) at twenty sovereigns per month, and that very evening put up the board over their door which proclaimed the advent of two skilled mechanics to Marycross.

*Buildings run up with solidity and despatch, and  
Carpentering in all its branches.*

'Heavens!' exclaimed Marsden to his junior

partner as they lay on their respective mattresses that night in their own furnished parlour, which was also kitchen and bedroom, 'what *should* we do if a customer wanted a house to-morrow ?'

'Why, run it up, to be sure,' replied his companion; 'run it up, of course, like lamplighters.'

Marsden groaned: 'And what, oh most impudent of men, are we to do for timber ?'

Miles Ripon struck his fist against the floor, with the first exclamation of annoyance he had yet uttered, and confessed, with ludicrous penitence, that he had clean forgotten all about the timber. 'The first thing to be done, however,' said he 'is manifestly to cut it down—the trees hereabouts, I reckon, being public property.'

'Cut it down and run it up are, therefore, to be our two watchwords,' rejoined Marsden. 'How bowed the woods beneath their sturdy stroke!' muttered he as he turned round to sleep, 'and I wonder how they will ?'

The next morning the two partners were busily engaged in axing the foot of a red gum-tree; not the one that Ripon would have fixed upon—which was about two hundred feet high, with a trunk in proportion, and would have taken them at least a week to fell—but one of less ambitious growth, selected by Marsden, who had often pursued the country gentleman's occupation of 'thinning the timber,' and understood his work; still, with only one axe, and that a little one, and with nobody to assist him—for poor Miles was worse than nobody, and could never hit the tree at the right spot—the affair promised to

be rather a tedious one. Long before it was completed, they were interrupted by the very dirtiest Chinaman whom they had yet beheld, although all Chinamen are dirty, and the Australian diggings had already begun to swarm with them. He wore blue baggy breeches, and a blue blouse, shoes like canoes, and a hat that had the appearance of having been formerly a bee-hive, but was now devoted to the harbouring of inferior inhabitants. He had a flat face and almond eyes, and but that he trotted up to them like a cow, might have been one of those motionless figures who stand for ever upon that bridge in our willow-pattern plates, and fish.

That he wanted something, was obvious from the incessant and apparently angry chattering that he made; but *what* he wanted was a problem that the two adventurers did not know how to solve.

'Hanged if I don't think it's his Tree!' cried Ripon in hysterics of laughter; 'he's touching it as if it was. I never stole a tree before in my life; never. Hi!' roared he, at the top of his voice, and under the popular delusion that speaking in a very loud key was equivalent to using the language of the unfortunate foreigner, 'is this *your* tree—*your* gum-tree?'

'Ge, ge!' responded the Chinaman intelligently, and nodding his bee-hive a very great number of times.

'Then—I—wish—you—may—get—it,' observed Ripon, enunciating every word with distinctness, and in a voice that could be heard at least half a mile away.



'Ge!' assented the Chinaman approvingly, as if he felt that expression of sympathy, and was grateful for it.

'I tell you what,' said Marsden gravely, 'since you seem to understand each other so well, I wish you would persuade him to get to leeward of my nose; he don't smell like a China rose, I do assure you.'

At that moment the distinguished foreigner tapped the bark of the gum-tree solemnly three times, and then lying down upon his back, and shutting his almond eyes, presented the unmistakable appearance of a dead Chinaman.

"'Friends at a distance will please to accept this as an intimation,'" observed Marsden, quoting from the death-notice in north-country newspapers; 'I don't know what else he can mean.'

'I have got it,' cried Miles Ripon exultingly; 'he wants us to make him a gum-tree coffin, and bury him.'

'What! bury him alive?' cried the senior partner in some alarm; 'the thing is perfectly impossible.'

'Not at all,' replied Ripon gravely; '*Carpentering in all its branches*, if you please; that includes Undertaking, and all the rest of it. Don't it, my Celestial friend?'

'Ge!' replied the still prostrate foreigner in a solemn voice.

'And moreover,' pursued Miles, 'this is obviously a religious Chinaman, who is under a vow or something to Mr. Budder, or whoever it is, to get himself buried before his time. What right have we to

make our European prejudices interfere with this good man's honest convictions ?'

At the conclusion of this expression of truly liberal opinion, the supposed fanatic arose from his recumbent position and pointed toward the neighbouring gold-diggings.

'He wants to be buried *there*,' said Ripon, with the air of a man who has at last mastered some difficult problem in all its bearings.

'He wants us to bury somebody else,' exclaimed Marsden in a tone of relief; 'I wonder how much he is prepared to pay Messrs. Marsden, Ripon, and Company for that nice little job.'

'Hi! how much money—dibs—needful—Rhino (*that sounds like a Chinese word, don't it?*) do you mean to give?' asked the junior partner.

Whether Rhino be or be not a term for ready money in the regions of Cathay is yet a matter of doubt, for although the Chinaman's eyes gleamed with an intelligence not before exhibited the moment that the word was uttered, there might have been another cause for it in the little handful of gold which Marsden took out and shook at the same instant.

'Ge, ge!' cried the delighted foreigner—and this time there could be no mistake about the satisfaction with which that hard-worked monosyllable was uttered—as he produced a small nugget from his pocket, evidently as payment for the job proposed.

'It's worth ten pounds at least,' observed Ripon, examining it closely.

'I gave more than twenty for mine, which is not so large,' said Marsden.

‘Very likely,’ replied the junior partner drily, and as if he had no great confidence in the head of the firm as a judge of Rhino in its raw material. ‘I think we had better accompany the Celestial.’

Accordingly, having secured their tools at home, they followed their new acquaintance a distance of some two miles to the Chinese quarter of the Mary-cross diggings. There they found many score of his pigtailed brethren, encamped, as is the custom of their nation, upon ground that other diggers had already worked, but which, disliking labour, they prefer to investigate anew, although, of course, without hope of very considerable profit. The unfortunate deceased, who lay in one of the least savoury of the miserable tents, was attired in his customary blue clothing, and held in his rigid hand, by way of passport to the other world, a paper with a Chinese prayer upon it. Some rice was strewed at his feet, which was supposed to be a propitiatory sacrifice to the devil (who, if such is the case, must be far easier pleased than is represented), and there were a couple of joss-sticks burning; and this was all the ceremony which the poor pious Chinaman, who was the dead man’s brother, could afford. He was by no means overcome with grief, however, but rather, having done all that lay in his power, was disposed to take a philosophical view of the matter.

An English digger, who acted as a very indifferent interpreter, informed them that the living Celestial quite counted upon their carrying his departed relative away with them, there and then, and burying him in some spot which was not likely to be dis-

turbed by the unhallowed hands of the gold-seekers ; but Messrs. Marsden and Ripon hastened to assure him, that it was not the custom of their highly respectable firm to perform funeral obsequies at such an exceedingly short notice. They agreed with the digger, for the sum of two sovereigns, that he should dig a grave of the requisite size in the neighbourhood of the gum-tree, as well as convey the body to it, while they, on their part, promised to complete the coffin by the ensuing morning.

The two adventurers not only felled their tree that forenoon, but split up planks—about the thickness of Vauxhall sandwiches—in more than sufficient number to supply the reasonable needs of the defunct Celestial ; the reason of the excess being, that they had ignorantly made the coffin almost a complete square, having fissures in it after the manner of an orange-case ; and this gave the digger not a little extra trouble, who had allowed, in his excavations, a very scanty margin indeed, even if the ordinary method of sepulture had been adopted. When it is added that the unconscious Chinaman was dragged by his pig-tail the entire distance from the tent to his place of interment, we may conclude that the arrangements generally were scarcely such as would have done credit to a Metropolitan Necropolis Company.

## CHAPTER XVI.

## THE YOUNG AUTHORESS.

MORE than once it has been of importance to the writer of this history that he should arise before five o'clock on a summer morning in the metropolis, but he has only effected that feat upon a single occasion. Persons who have not enjoyed this experience, and who are easily discomfited, are hereby solemnly warned not to let fancied calls of duty or business hale them up at such an unnaturally early hour into London streets. The awakening itself, produced by successive shocks on the tympanum of the ear, communicating to us at length the despairing energies of the housemaid outside the door, is eery and unpleasant in the extreme, and seems to afford some hints of the nature of metempsychosis. We appear to suffer a change for the worse of the most surprising character. It is broad daylight, such as we have been wont to go about our daily work in, but it is abhorrent to our vision; we feel our unfitness for it, and a desire for darkness above all things. Why is all so brilliant, and yet so still? 'Night, more night,' is the aspiration we would make use of, if we were equal to the expression of such a sentiment; which, however, we are far from being. Are we Owls that our eyelids wink and quiver so inhumanly? No; unhappily we are not

owls, for we have presently to put on clothes and shave. Why does the policeman tread like forty of the force in one, and why does he not move on, as he is always making other people do, and not confine his monotonous march to the flagstones beneath our window? Hark! Tap, tap, tap, tap, tap, Tap. 'I'm getting up (which is, however, false); it's all right, Susan; I'm quite awake.' Tap, tap, Tap. '*Don't*. Confound the woman, does she think I'm deaf or a born-idiot?' Tap, tap, tap, tap, tap, Tap. Oh, it isn't our own door, after all, but in the street, where everything sounds exactly as if it were in the room. The policeman is waking some other poor devil. Tap, tap, tap, tap, tap, tap, all down the street, till we fling ourselves out of bed at last as if we had got a death-watch in our brain, whereas it's only the housemaids all along the row on both sides being called by the Civil Force. Our first glance, because we wish to know the worst at once, is to the looking-glass. Metempsychosis indeed! What blear-eyed, prickly chinned, unshaven creature is this?

If it be I, as I do fear it be,  
I'm glad Miss Jones is snug abed, and don't see *me*!

We are certainly not in a condition to make a favourable impression on the heart of woman. Everybody who is walking about—and there are now three persons beside the policeman—is apparently shod with iron: two feet have got pattens on, belonging to a female lunatic, as we should imagine, since it is quite dry; three feet have the hugest

hobnails; and there is a sixth footstep, which is that of a wooden leg with an iron rim to it. How angrily it stumps along, and at what a pace, as though it would persuade people that in point of speed at least wooden legs have a great advantage over those of flesh and blood! Can this be really the case? Attracted by this idea, and especially by the excuse it affords us for taking a chair, we sit down in order to consider it in all its bearings. At this moment, the great church clock close by, which we never, as far as we remember, heard strike in all our lives before, proclaims, with the most acrimonious distinctness, that it is five o'clock. There is therefore just one half hour wherein to wash, to dress, to shave, to breakfast—but who wants breakfast, or indeed anything else, except to go to bed again?—and to procure a cab. The jolt to the railway station in that musty, fusty, dusty, rusty conveyance, is something too loathsome to be dwelt upon; the animated scarecrow who conducts us, and who has enjoyed the unquestionable advantage of sleeping in his clothes, selects the very worst streets to drive through; and in a certain Mews, upon the top of an unsavoury heap of straw, we behold the bird of day, and hear him crow. Otherwise, unbreakfasted, unnewspapered, unnatural as are all our feelings, we could not believe it morning!

But in the country, be it known, this writer is by no means of a sluggish nature. There, where the roses tapping at the window-pane alone give notice that the morning breeze has risen, and 'sucked from out the distant gloom,' begun 'to tremble o'er

the large leaves of the sycamore, and fluctuate all the still perfume,' we need no human knuckles to awaken us. What a sin it seems as we fasten back the lattice, and let the fragrance-laden zephyr in, that we should lose in slumber such glorious sights and concord of sweet sounds as early morning offers! No brook should brawl close by, or Sleep will reassume her sway; but let not a still clear pool be absent, with the just awakened lilies gleaming freshly in the sunlight, and pillowed upon their broad green leaves. A garden should be immediately beneath; then undulating fenceless pasture specked with cattle; and in the background, clear against the eastern sky, the hills, or the illimitable sea. Such at least was the scene which every summer morning offered to Florence Bateman, leaning from the window of her chamber at Rudesleigh Manor; but Ellen slept on, unconscious that her bedfellow was daily up and dressed three hours before herself. 'What is there to get up for?' she would sometimes petulantly observe to her elder sister; 'the scene won't change: it isn't a dissolving view.' It was not, however, merely to 'stare at the scenery,' as Ellen asserted, that Florence was wont to leave her pillow so early, and having noiselessly performed her toilet, to betake herself to the adjoining boudoir, or lady's snuggery. She went there to work—not at crochet, nor in Berlin wool, nor at potichomanie, nor in oils, nor in water-colours, nor in gold-leaf on Chinese screens, nor in making indifferent and unsavoury oak-leaves out of honest leather; no; she could have pursued all



these useful arts in the great drawing-room, and under ever so many pairs of eyes, without a blush : she went to work at healthy literature, and no young lady likes to be caught at *that*, we fancy. Far be it from this pen to tinge the hem of her garment 'blue,' by setting down the titles of half the volumes she had conscientiously 'got through.' Enough to say that she had drunk deeply at the pure well of English undefiled, and innocent the while as Una, had never used the patent Bowdler filter. Sometimes the draughts were unpalatable, particularly where her own sweet sex was harshly spoken of, as happened before the nineteenth century taught authors gallantry ; and sometimes they seemed a little long. She read the *Faëry Queen* aloud to herself from beginning to end, and some of the cantos even twice over, half from admiration, half from doubt as to the precise spot where she had left off before. Her father had never narrowed her reading area, and she had cropped the verdant fields of history and fiction with unceasing assiduity. But although she was far too sensible to imagine herself educated, her work was just at this time no longer reading, but writing. What she wrote was not like the productions of most young ladies at all—one half French phrases, and the other half pathos with a B. Although she had a rose-wood escritoire, with a hundred little tinkling drawers, to write upon, and a mother-of-pearl blotting-book to carry off the superfluous ink from the best cream-laid, she was never betrayed into a line that would have become an album. . She would

have preferred a plain deal desk and a ream of foolscap, very far, of her own property. This using of other people's goods, indeed, was the whole secret of Florence Bateman's extreme devotion to literature. She did not approve of her family's making their home with Sir Charles Ryder, upon whom they had no claim whatever, and, as she feared, even something worse than no claim. She could not conceal from herself that her sister was the desire of the young man's heart, and to her attraction she too hastily attributed their welcome at Rudesleigh Manor. Ellen, who had taken Florence's advice so far as to acquaint Sir Charles at once with her engagement to Marsden, was indisposed to make herself unnecessarily uncomfortable. She had been explicit enough, indeed almost rude to the poor young man, she said, and if it was still a pleasure to him to have her near him—Well, if that was a wrong way to look at it, dearest Florence, who was so clever, might find her a better reason, but for her part she saw no harm in the thing. Besides, if they were to insist upon leaving the place, what would Papa say? Her sister would not be so 'cru-cru-cruel' (sobbing) as to tell him about dearest Robert, surely?

Mr. Onslow Bateman himself appeared perfectly satisfied with his new quarters. He pronounced his bedroom comfortable, and his study absolute perfection—although a bay-window would perhaps have been preferable to a bow—a change which was carried out within eight-and-forty hours of its suggestion. The general character of the house was Elizabethan, his favourite style, and the warm

glow of its colouring elicited his decided approval. The ex-tutor was a striking and triumphant example of the fallacy of the doctrine, that to be happy, a man must be employed ; that what conventional persons describe as 'regular work,' is essential to mental tranquillity. Mr. Onslow Bateman, who did not call the house up at unnecessarily early hours, would pass the after-breakfast part of a summer forenoon, and until luncheon-time, under a purple beech upon the lawn, smoking a particular kind of regalia, and trimming his pink nails with an elaborate instrument invented for that purpose ; and this to the utmost satisfaction and content of his own mind. No one who ever enjoyed his company in this pastoral retreat had seen him yawn, or themselves experienced any approach to drowsiness. London club-acquaintances of the young baronet, who had grown amazingly friendly since his brother's death, were perfectly enchanted with Mr. Bateman, and wanted to carry him away with them to Pall Mall.

'Hang me,' observed one of them, with a charming frankness, when a little circle of his brother-exquisites had been passing a morning under the beech-tree, with even a greater pleasure than usual, 'why, you're as good as Talking Harrison, and yet you let others get their word in beside yourself.'

Mr. Onslow Bateman smiled upon this humble admirer after the manner of a benignant jin. 'Mr. Harrison, it is more than probable, then, does not smoke ?'

'No, sir; he does nothing *but* talk, confound him; but he talks exceedingly well.'

'Conversation, properly so called,' explained Mr. Bateman, removing with a couple of fingers, acting like Chinese chopsticks, the regalia from his eloquent lips, 'can scarcely be carried on in these days without tobacco. There are so many persons, such as the gentleman you mention, who have, so to speak, no breaks to their trains of thought whatever; who have a determination of words to the mouth which they cannot arrest. The judicious weed will extinguish itself rather than suffer its proprietor to lecture or monologize. You see, it will not permit me to weary you with even the praise of its divine qualities.'

Solemn silence, illustrated by nods of adhesion and approval, succeeded these sentiments.

'You happen to have nothing striking to say upon this subject, which, indeed, is easily exhausted,' continued Mr. Bateman, 'and therefore you wisely hold your peace. If you had not been smoking, it is probable that some uncalled-for, and therefore feeble remark would have been hazarded. There would have been a fear that the conversation would drop, and a person totally unqualified for the office might perhaps have endeavoured to keep it up. As it is, no one speaks for the sake of speaking; no one who has, in short, got nothing to say. In a word, harangues and platitudes are alike impossible among smokers, and the cigar may well be called the parent of conversation.'

'I am afraid,' observed Ryder, 'that the ladies

without sympathy with her independent opinions, Florence Bateman had no resource but in herself. She accordingly set regularly to work as an authoress by profession; trusting, if she did not overrate her abilities, to procure the means by which she might be able to rescue her darling sister, in spite of herself, from what she could not but consider a somewhat humiliating position. Her own dependence—in which, moreover, there was nothing so especially unbecoming—was but a secondary cause for regret to her; and this perhaps was one of the reasons which rendered her diligent assiduity not altogether without success. Like all young persons ignorant of the nature of periodical literature, she had regarded the writing of poetry as being likely to afford her some substantial help. She might as well have tried the stage, with no other qualification for it than a special gift for representing a flying fairy in a pantomime. Verses, like virtue, are their own reward in the magazines; and it must be confessed that, for the most part, they are not under-paid. The majority of young persons who write good prose write tolerable poetry, which if Gods and Men do not admire, still the Columns of the periodicals are ready enough to receive on the aforesaid scale of remuneration. Florence Bateman, who had never quarrelled with a friend in her life, and if she had, would have never been happy till she made it up again, felt a divine impulse, as she imagined—and it certainly must have been a pretty strong one, since she sat up half the night to comply with it—to write *The Lost*

*Friend*; a terrible social catastrophe in sixteen rhymes :—

I would not look upon his face, nor meet the change within his eyes,  
For all the wealth that, garnered in that fair broad forehead, makes  
him wise ;

I would not have his right hand touch mine own, and then to fall again,  
For all the tenderness that fills his being as flowers the rain ;  
Nor hear his silver stringèd speech set shivering to an idle tune,  
Nor see the shadow round about that heart where once was brightest  
noon,

For all the praise that gilds his name, and all the worth that earns  
the praise,

Nay, nor for even some Lethe-charm that might make dark those  
happier days.

Tell him that if the man should die who was so dear to me of old,  
And I should read the numbered years of goodness on his marble  
scrolled,

To me they would not count aright, who through his life had loved  
him well,

And mourned him dead long since, and known—none better—how his  
end befell.

But when this lonely road shall cease, and I am lightened of my pain,  
Say on—my happy faith is firm, our cloven souls shall meet again ;  
Unchanged in all that made them one, and with no power to under-  
stand

What once could chill two loving hearts, and numb the grasp of either's  
hand.

This was the first literary effort that she had ventured to send to a magazine, and it was accepted. Certainly the ancients were without at least one pleasurable excitement which we now enjoy. The intellectual Grecian youth could never experience the bliss of 'seeing himself in print' for the first time. There was no *Διετήσια* (*All the Year Round*), no *Οικήματα* (*Chambers*'), no *Μελανυλης* (*Blackwood*), nor even a *Voice from the Pnyx*, with a Poet's

Corner for his unfledged Alcaics. It is true that on the other hand, he was saved from the disappointments attending all those who pant for hebdomadal or monthly immortality. No editor ever dimmed his disappointed young eyes with that ratsbane in elegant wrapper, the *Κάλλιστα ἐπαινοῦμεν*, or Declined with Thanks; nor was he informed, with cutting politeness, that his otherwise most meritorious communication was not adapted for the pages of the *Athenian Review*. Editors did not keep his roll of papyrus, leading him to imagine, poor fellow, for months and months, that it was accepted, and then send it back with the postage insufficiently paid. Nevertheless, since one success is providentially held by the young contributor to atone for half-a-dozen failures, we are of opinion that Miss Florence Bateman lost nothing in this respect by not having been an ancient Greek. *The Lost Friend* gave her a kind patron, whose first advice, as soon as he was aware of her intention of making her own living by her pen, was at once to part with her Pegasus, and employ a less showy but more serviceable steed.

‘There are just two individuals in this kingdom, my dear young lady,’ wrote the editor, who was old enough to be her grandfather, and had corresponded with her under her *nom de plume* two or three times already, ‘who make their living, that is to say, derive a considerable income, from the sale of their poetry. One of these is a man of genius, but the other is a fool. Only some half-dozen bards beside these can be said to make money by their verses at

all, and they would, each of them, it is probable, make more money by any other profession which they took up instead. By all means write verses when you feel inc—I beg your pardon—when the divine impulse moves you; it is more satisfactory and refreshing to you than prose, I can well believe; but shun it altogether as a means of livelihood, for it is a mere Will-of-the-Wisp, which must needs lure you to misery. Be sure I do not intend to be harsh and unhopeful in this matter; but if you had the experience I have had of what comes of it—of what must come of it—in persons of sensitive natures without the comfortable incomes that should accompany them, you would, I am sure, at once see the necessity of such a course. The *honorarium* for *The Lost Friend* accompanies this—and the other two manuscripts also, which are, alas! below the mark (hard-hearted old brute, isn't it?)—I wish it were a greater sum, but small as it is, I fear it will do you harm. You will think you have found the entrance to Golconda. Yes; by all means send rejected papers elsewhere; there are a great number of foolish editors about besides your sincere well-wisher and obedient servant.'

This unknown old gentleman, this inscrutable We, who indeed was both kind and wise, was considered by Florence in the light of a guardian angel; and she obeyed his behests implicitly to the best of her power. But the writing of verses—however strange it may seem—is a far less difficult matter to those who can do it at all than the writing of prose. The rhymes, which are apparently such an obstacle, are



in reality, by their suggestiveness, an assistance; the single subject is a light not easily lost sight of, and about which the fancy naturally plays; the beginning is self-prompted, and the end can be brought about at the poet's pleasure. The writing of a prose paper, upon the other hand, is comparatively a long business, and can hardly—unless it be a mere essay or review—be undertaken in the same simple manner. 'What shall it be about?'—singularly enough, since all the field of fiction lies as yet untilled before the youthful delver—is the question most difficult to answer; and then, 'How shall I begin? How shall I end?' Practised tale-writers have, of course, no difficulty of this sort, until a more dreadful phase commences with them than the first start, namely, the period when they find themselves—what the general public has probably found out long before—'worked out:' when their field of fiction has been dug and redug in every direction—ay, sometimes even under the fence and into their neighbour's field—and the golden vein is ended, and the poor assiduous miner must needs lay by his tools for ever, with which he has worked so pleasantly and long. Alas, alas! How

Little think the proud ones who in their first-class carriage on the railway

Skim through those cheap books they purchase at the stations,

What hard work 'tis, not only to read them—but also to write them!

'Needy Bookmaker, how came you to make books,'

(*That*, if they knew all, would be their just reflection)

'When Praise comes so slowly, and when Pudding never!'

Again and again did Florence Bateman seat herself

at the rosewood escritoire in those early summer mornings, and seek in vain for inspiration from the embossed ceiling, or the blue dome of heaven. She had the rare and blessed gift of knowing when she was writing nonsense; and, therefore, whatever she wrote she judiciously tore up again. At last, there suddenly leaped, as it were, feet foremost into her brain, a crude but certain notion of a 'plot,' and she seized it with avidity. Well aware that she had not gone to work in a very artistic method, she yet felt perfectly confident that the desired object was, at length, however heterodoxly, obtained. Hour after hour, morning after morning, this idea took shape, and became a reality with her; gradually, very gradually—for she thought, poor dear, over every sentence, as if she had been issuing oracles—expanded into chapters; gathered new characters, snow-ball fashion, as it advanced; culminated in the principal catastrophe; and, in short, she completed, after many months, a two-volume novel. How nice it sounded as she read it aloud to herself the first time! How unsatisfactory was the second reading! How positively unbearable the third! Nevertheless, the story haunted her; and she lived scarce less among the persons she had created, than with the flesh-and-blood inhabitants of Rudesleigh Manor. Then she sat down and re-wrote it—hideous task!—making it as perfect as her carefullest art could make it. At last, distrusting it altogether, thinking meanly of it, except in certain delicious moments, but confident, nevertheless, that she had at all events done her best, she dropped it

with her own hands into the village post-office, directed to her literary Mentor. A fortnight's cruel suspense—ah, heart-breaking editor! why not make an end of us at once?—and Florence Bateman took heart to write again, soliciting a reply. It is this very morning that she is expecting his answer, sitting at the open window which commands the path up which the postman comes.

There is nothing with which the professional critic makes himself so merry as with the disappointment of sucking authors. He underrates both it and them. He says that they deserve it, or that it does them good, or that it doesn't matter. This arises from one of two causes. He either despises the profession of the Writer—having himself, in many instances, another string to his bow than Literature, in practice at the bar, or the enjoyment of a government situation—and considers him rather a low sort of character, of minor consideration; or, having experienced a good many of such rubs himself, he is positively glad to see another suffering the same misfortunes. We, however, will take leave to feel for dear Miss Florence, who herself thinks, and not unreasonably, that she has a great stake in the matter, and to sympathise with the little trembling heart as it pit-a-pats to the postman's horn. Her cheek is pale as she listens for an expected foot upon the stairs, which presently draws nigh. It is not that of Mrs. Allwyne, nor of any old inhabitant of Teesdale How, for they are now serving other mistresses. It is not the step of a servant at all; and the knock at the door says, 'It

is I, my love,' and not 'Are you in, please, miss?' What a charming little old lady! Something like a white mouse—she is so white and small—with a pair of gold spectacles, and the most benevolent air in all the world. She is Miss Ryder, Charles's aunt—without whom, indeed, to 'do propriety,' how was it possible for our young ladies to reside at Rudesleigh?—and she holds in her mittened hand no letter indeed, but a most suspicious-looking manuscript.

'I am afraid, Floy dearest, it has come back again.'

'I am afraid so, too, dear Miss Ryder,' said the other cheerfully, but very sick at heart.

'It is a sad disappointment; but we must begin again, my love, that's all,' said the old lady soothingly. 'I see it is indeed your handwriting inside the cover. May I open it, dear?'

Florence nodded, and walked to the window, because she did not wish her eyes to be seen.

'There is very little of it, too,' continued the old lady; 'less than you sent, I think, surely. I hope at least that the wicked people haven't lost any of it. Some of it's printed too; what's that for?'

'Printed!' cried Florence eagerly; 'what is printed? Let me see.'

She threw her arms round the astonished little woman's neck, and kissed her in a manner which, if we had witnessed, we should have called aggravating. 'My dear, dear friend,' cried she, 'it's all right, and I'm so happy! That is what they call

“a proof” of the first chapter, and my own manuscript comes back to correct it from.’

‘Goodness gracious me! then they ain’t wicked people after all,’ replied the old lady with admiration.

‘They’re excellent people,’ exclaimed the young girl, laughing through her tears.

‘And my own dear Florence is a real live authoress, is she?’

‘Yes,’ cried the delighted neophyte, ‘you dear old duck, she is; and God bless you!’

## CHAPTER XVII.

## HORSE-DEALING EXTRAORDINARY.

THE firm of Marsden and Ripon, Builders, Marycross, had of late progressed amazingly. They had purchased the house which they previously rented, along with its articles of furniture—which were six in number. The junior partner now superintended the cutting down, and the senior partner the running-up departments. They built vast numbers of huts for the goldseekers, and were obliged to keep several horses to take their cart, full of planks, many times a day to the diggings. They thus cleared thirty-seven pounds, ten, the first week, deducting all expenses, and exclusive of their little Undertaking transaction ; and seemed to have sunk their shaft into the right spot for the nuggets at last. Their horses, however, cost them exceedingly dear, and the bad roads soon used them up, so that they grew un-serviceable. They had to buy their horses now instead of borrowing them ; and this matter soon became their chief consideration. One magnificent black mare, which had cost them ninety pounds, was found to be unable to carry a load down hill, and to lie down whenever she was touched with the whip ; she also went lame the second day after her purchase, and caused the partners to be convened to a solemn council of Finance. It was therein decided that

the animal should be taken to Melbourne, and there parted with to the weakest purchaser at the highest figure, and another horse and more convenient cart brought back instead. Marsden, who from coming of a country gentleman's family, knew a good deal about horses, and had rather a passion for deceiving his fellow-creatures in that line, was to take this charge upon himself, and to leave Ripon behind to manage the business.

'I will just step into Old Simon's,' said he, 'and see whether he wants anything from town, and start the first thing in the morning. We ought to be able to pay our expenses on the journey, at least, by carrier's work.'

Old Simon kept the only store in the station, not much bigger than the odds-and-ends shop of a small English village, but it was a post that gave him a good position in the settlement; and besides that, he was of himself a man of some mark. He lived alone, and managed his affairs without assistance, although he was very little short of eighty years of age. A long white beard, descending almost to his middle, did its best to impart to him a benevolent expression, which, however, the fire that still lurked under his shaggy eyebrows not a little marred. It was conjectured that Old Simon had not always been engaged in such peaceful pursuits as at present, and that the ancient scars still visible upon his bronzed forehead and hairy arms were scarcely the records of an unbroken commercial existence. Whatever he had been in his hot youth, however, nothing could be more quiet and sober than was the

old gentleman's behaviour now. He had never had a quarrel with any of his neighbours throughout the half-dozen years he had been among them, and some of them were difficult customers to deal with, too. His talk, which never alluded to his previous circumstances, was at all times reserved; but his advice had been freely offered to the building firm upon its first settlement at Marycross, and had been of great value to them. In particular, he had shown a kindness towards Marsden which he had not been hitherto seen to exhibit towards any other person, and that young gentleman reciprocated his goodwill, and openly pronounced that 'the old buffer was a regular trump.' His store lay a little apart from the other buildings, and was generally quiet enough, for no liquor was sold there, which would otherwise have made it a general rendezvous. As Marsden drew near to it that evening, he was therefore surprised to find it full of people, and the scene of much excitement and turmoil. An American gentleman, one of a band of his fellow-countrymen who had recently arrived at the Marycross Diggings, a little way gone in liquor, and a very great way gone in native ill-humour and insolence, was holding forth to a company there assembled upon the propriety of 'chawing Old Simon up for good and all.' Having been steadily refused some article which he had insisted upon buying at considerably under cost-price, he had resented it as an encroachment upon his personal freedom and independence.

'I guess you 've lived too long, old man, *you* have.



‘You won’t see me shot down by a lot of Yankees!’ exclaimed the young man coolly, addressing the Marycross portion of his audience with that easy confidence which seldom fails to carry its own warrant. ‘Thank you, gentlemen. I thought you would never let *that* be. We’re seven to six, so the survivor will be on our side when each has killed his man.’

Old Simon, who had vanished in some mysterious manner beneath his counter, now reappeared, and spoke for the first time. ‘Pray, let there be no bloodshed under this roof, and above all, upon my account, young gentleman. If the man’s revolver is hurt, I will give him a better one, but let us have no murder done, for God’s sake.’ The old man’s words had little weight with either party, but the time consumed in listening to them was of value in stopping the immediate broil.

‘It seems to me,’ observed an Englishman quietly, ‘that it would be more according to common sense—although I’m as game as any man for a general scrimmage—that the two as made the quarrel should fight it out. What say you, my young mister?’

‘I say, with all my heart,’ observed Marsden carelessly; ‘but we must make haste about it, for I start to-morrow at sunrise.’

‘You’ll not do that, I reckon,’ responded the Yankee savagely; ‘I guess you’ll be catawampciously chawed up this night, you will.’

‘Come out, you chattering jail-bird!’ replied Marsden, who was not in a conciliatory frame of mind, and whose contempt and hatred of the Yankee

race was at all times extreme. 'Take off your coat, and hold your boastful tongue. Put your stabbing-knife away, there, and double your fists as much like a man as you can.'

This mode of fighting was objected to by the other party, as not being of a sufficiently sanguinary character to suit their man, and gratify the stomach of his great revenge; but the crowd which had by this time been drawn together outside the store from the village was overwhelmingly English, and hailed the proposal of a match at fisticuffs much in the same manner as the more poetical portion of the Australian public upon a more recent occasion welcomed a daisy. It was redolent to them of the old country, and awoke all sorts of pleasant reminiscences.

'A ring, a ring!' was shouted, and the two combatants stepped forward into the speedily formed circle of spectators. Robert Marsden was seconded by his junior partner, who had been attracted like the rest by the disturbance, and was surprised enough to find his friend the moving cause of it. The Yankee was the peculiar care, not of one, but of all his countrymen, who each bestowed upon him their particular advice and instruction in such phrases as, 'Gouge him!' 'Gouge the darn'd crittur's eye!' 'Whittle that ere skunk to chips!' with other encouraging adjurations. The antagonists were stripped to their waists in a few seconds, and exhibited sufficient contrast to have been taken as types of their respective races. The Yankee was tall and bony, with little flesh or blood, but years and exercise had given him a superiority in respect

of muscle, which stood out of his hard long arms like lumps of iron. The Britisher was rather less in height, and what the 'Fancy' designate as 'fleshy;' but his limbs had the litheness of youth, and worked together with a unison and mutual understanding that are scarcely attainable without some practice in the art of self-defence.

Many a time, before his residence at Teesdale How, had the young lad responded to the challenge of 'Will you meet me after four?' addressed to him at his public school by some boyish rival; and many a time had he settled that question of supremacy in his own favour behind the fives court wall, and in the presence of a discerning though youthful public. Not otherwise, then, did he 'go in' at his present antagonist than as one confident of victory, and with a mind bent solely upon inflicting condign punishment. His eye had little of that caution with which it had been wont to regard the evolutions of Jones *major* or Brown *minor*, when he had found himself opposed to those redoubtable young heroes, but rather glanced with the expression denominated 'mischief;' nor did his eye do injustice to his intentions. He would have fought a drayman of his own country about a dispute of who should have the wall, with the most perfect good-humour; but this bloodthirsty Yankee, who had ill-treated a poor old man of fourscore, and had even threatened to whip *him*—Robert Marsden—was a foe deserving quite another sort of treatment. He was determined to show him that there was ample revenge to be got out of even a pugilistic encounter, if one only

knows how to set about it. He therefore, for the first three rounds, contented himself with aggravating his opponent by a series of taps administered to his more prominent features, at the same time taking care to prevent the other's furious blows from reaching *their* destination. Then, when the unfortunate knifeless Yankee was reduced to the condition of a maddened wild beast without claws or teeth, he undertook the operation of taming him, which was indeed a very interesting spectacle. Sometimes he would drive him back upon his seconds, like an obstinate nail into boxwood, with blow after blow delivered upon his astonished forehead; and sometimes he would stand his own ground, and keep his enemy at arm's-length with steady hitting, as the rock repels the wave. His grand *coup* was obliged to be made earlier than he had intended, for fear of his almost exhausted antagonist giving up the contest. The infuriated Yankee had husbanded his remaining strength for a final rush at the throat of his foe, wherein, of course, he did not confine himself to the rules of *Fistiana*. Marsden suffered him to approach within distance, dashed his outstretched arms away, and received his transatlantic head 'into chancery.' Nothing further needs to be narrated to British ears. When Mithridates Pontus Chips (which was the American gentleman's name) dropped out of that well-known place of durance, he looked like a bread-seal, very inaccurately stamped. There were the traces of a certain original design about his countenance, but that was all; the rest was as dough, which had been more than sufficiently kneaded.

‘I am afraid,’ said Ripon as the two friends walked away amid the British cheering, ‘that this victory will, sooner or later, cost us dear.’

‘Victory,’ echoed Marsden disdainfully; ‘I did but beat a vicious hound.’

‘There is a whole pack of them, however,’ replied Ripon gravely, ‘and the misfortune is that they are all blood-hounds.’

At this moment a hand was laid upon Marsden’s arm, and old Simon entreated him to come into his store a moment, as he had something to say to him.

‘To be sure,’ said Marsden gaily; ‘that American beggar put our Melbourne business quite out of my head.’

As soon as they were within the store, and the door was closed, Simon wrung the young man’s hand with an energy not to have been expected from one of his years, and exclaimed almost passionately: ‘My life will not be a long one, lad, but as long as it lasts, I am your friend for what you have done this night. If they had touched so much as a hair of your head, they should all have perished here and then. See,’ cried he, lifting up the inner partition of the counter, which hung upon a hinge; ‘that barrel yonder, under the store, is filled with gunpowder. When I saw them cock their revolvers at your head, I had that match-box at the bung-hole; had they slain thee, they would all have passed to judgment the next minute.’

‘And you,’ exclaimed Marsden, struck by the fiery life that still dwelt in the speech and action of the ancient man; ‘would *you* not have perished also?’

'Ay,' returned Simon solemnly, 'my soul would have gone to witness against them in the same hour. It has been ready long. Why,' asked he, observing Marsden's look of astonished horror, 'why should I have hesitated to destroy a nest of murderous knaves, or those heartless cowards who would have let them shoot thee down? I have sent better men to their tombs before now for far less reasons. Did I seem afraid, think you, when you bully threatened me? I have stood a storm of bullets from a dozen such as he, and never blenched. Forty years of bloodshed teach a man to look down a pistol-muzzle without much blinking.'

'I did not know you had served,' replied Marsden with interest: 'but I always thought you a plucky old fellow, who might very likely have done his duty in that line.'

'I was once just such a dare-devil, handsome, reckless young fellow as you, young gentleman,' said the old man admiringly; 'and that perhaps it is which has always drawn me to you; but I came to shame, and brought others to it likewise. I was a selfish, bold, bad boy. Served? Yes, I have served in his majesty's navy, for I was a mutineer at the Nore; but there were worse things than that to serve, upon the high seas in those days.'

Old Simon paused a little at this place, and when he resumed, he dwelt no longer upon his experiences. 'I have been many things in a long life, however, and now you see I am but a feeble, garrulous old man. Nevertheless, I know these Yankees well; ride you armed to-morrow, and bid

your friend be on his guard whom you leave at home.'

Having delivered himself of which cautions, in a serious tone, but yet as though he spoke, after all, but of those dangers to which all men are more or less exposed, the old man plunged at once into commercial matters; described what articles he wished to be purchased for him at Melbourne; and having settled the price to be paid for their carriage, he parted with his young friend at the house-door with a second hearty shake of the hand.

Early the next morning, Robert Marsden was on the driving-seat of his vehicle—not a cart, as we have hitherto called it, for no cart could live upon the Bush-roads, but that sole importation from the United States which can be said to be popular in Australia, a Telegraph. It is not an elegant conveyance, but runs lightly enough; and the big black mare, in spite of her lameness, soon left the monotonous murmur of the Marycross Diggings behind her—that peculiar lullaby which is produced by a thousand cradles, the hum that the hive gives forth while the golden honey is making.

The way for the most part was sterile and uninteresting, although the hills were pretty thickly timbered, the trees being chiefly those unpicturesque ones called stringy-bark. The road was lonely enough, relieved only at rare intervals by the human face divine, itself scarcely recognisable amid those forests of hair which flourish so luxuriantly upon the razorless Digger. Whether he had started too early for them, or whether the American gentlemen

had had too much of our hero already, there were no signs of danger from Mithridates Pontus Chips and Company, and Marsden's revolver remained in his belt throughout the journey. On the banks of the winding but now streamless creeks through which he had often to pass, with even their water-holes dry and bare to the sun, there was generally a solitary inn or squatter's hut, where the universal 'nobbler' of brandy and a snack of food were to be procured; otherwise there was certainly nothing in that day's drive to console the exile for the loss of Westmoreland scenery, if he had chanced to have been looking out for the picturesque instead of Bushrangers. The absence of inland water in summer-time will always prevent much of Australia from taking a high rank in the scale of natural beauty, though the yellow grass and parched-up vegetation which accompany such droughts did not otherwise mar its features. Bacchus Marsh, with its fine land and cheerful home-looks, was however at last attained, and the black mare was glad enough to rest her swollen legs there.

The next day's journey was more attractive, with green grass growing upon at least the surrounding hillsides, with pleasant farms upon their spurs. The long soft slopes of the Pentlands, too, were refreshing to his heated eyes, with that glorious view at their termination towards Melbourne and Port Philip which has delighted so many hearts little used to feel the charms of scenery. Then the road grew barren and uninteresting again for miles. Of trees, indeed, there were none, but to a Cale-



donian's eye there was, in one place, an excellent substitute for them in that which combines the beauties of tree and flower—the Scotch thistle. Some emigrant from North Britain, more patriotic than prudent, had lately imported that valuable commodity into the colony, and it was already increasing and flourishing on a foreign soil as only a native of its own country could have done. It absolutely topped Mr. Robert Marsden on the driving-seat of his Telegraph, and tickled the ears of the lame black mare as she went by. Soon cottages began to dot the waysides at no great distance from one another, and a district was entered into wherein dwellers of twelve miles apart no longer designated one another neighbours. Then villages were passed through, in whose streets there seemed, by contrast to the recent scarcity of population, the inhabitants of a town. Presently, traffic began to throng the roads in carts drawn by bullocks or horses, with quite a hubbub of inland trade in sugar or flour; then a labyrinth of street-lines and allotments partially filled up, to which the by no means sluggish stream of immigration was expected to flow and settle; and at length, Melbourne itself.

Emerald Hill is not the most aristocratic portion of the colonial capital, and would have been contemned as a residence by Mr. Robert Marsden but a few months ago; yet thither he was now bound. Life in the bush is a forcing-house of experience; and the young man had now his course of proceeding mapped clearly before him in his ingenious mind. He obtained lodgings, which were by no means of a

detached and independent character, under canvas, and tethered his poor mare, upon whose account he had sought the abodes of men, to a peg of the tent. This was a far cheaper proceeding than going to a Melbourne hotel and sending Black Bess to a livery stable, and, under present circumstances, it was pretty nearly as safe a one. Black Bess's legs were just now about three times their usual size, and would scarcely have tempted a horse-stealer, while the cart, which had never been cleaned since Marsden had possessed it, was even less attractive. He, however, applied a couple of setons to the quadruped, and a couple of pots of black and yellow paint to the four-wheel, and after due time, with most satisfactory results in both cases; only the setons left a bald mark upon the mare's legs, which would have been a sad blemish indeed, had not her master, who had become quite an artist with his brush, laid on a little black paint of the required intensity, and rendered her to all appearance, as flawless as ever. Her lameness, too, disappeared almost entirely, although it was more than probable it would be reassumed with work; and in short the *tout ensemble* of mare, and cart, and driver, as they appeared in the horse-market some fortnight after their arrival, at a spanking trot, was a complete metamorphosis.

How much did he want for the whole set out? inquired a wary purchaser, with that hypocritical air of carelessness which rogues in horse-flesh can never throw off, even when they are dealing with one another. One hundred and forty pounds, did he? He (the would-be purchaser) seriously hoped that he

(the would-be seller) might get it. The latter—who was not come half across the globe to be ‘chaffed’ by a colonist—thanked him warmly for his good wishes, and replied cheerfully that he rather thought he should. There was certainly no other mare on view so powerful as that big black one, with her magnificent coat (of paint) and splendid (up-hill) action. The driver never so much as touched her with the whip as she trotted from bottom to top of the steep ascent.

‘If she ’ll take that load of bricks yonder up that hill,’ observed the wary purchaser, who in spite of his previous sarcasm, hung about the desired ‘set out’ as a wasp hangs round a sugar-basin, ‘I ’ll bid you a hundred and twenty pounds.’

‘My price is one hundred and forty,’ replied the young man, yawning. ‘There is no horse here who can take that load up there, whip him as you will. My mare shall trot with it to the first turning, three-quarters up, and I ’ll put the whip in your own hands.’

‘Will you take me up with you?’ asked the man suspiciously. ‘I should like to be with you when it was done.’

Marsden shook his head, and walked the big black mare away—she was a beautiful walker—before the other’s eyes.

‘If you *will*,’ cried the enraptured beholder, running after him, ‘I ’ll pay you the money—the hundred and forty pounds—in the cart, as soon as you get there.’

‘Done!’ exclaimed Marsden; ‘I ’ll agree to that.’

The bricks were pitched into the Telegraph, a little to its detriment; but that, reflected the young man, was the look-out of the *next* proprietor; the bidder climbed into his place and held the whip, while Marsden took up the reins with a good heart. He knew that the black mare would get the bricks up the hill, but he also knew that she would never bring them down again. Up she flew at a good round trot, to the admiration of everybody, and before she had reached the appointed limit, the purchaser expressed himself quite satisfied, and proposed to return and close the bargain.

'To make you perfectly sure about it,' said Marsden, 'and so that we may have no botheration afterwards—for I am the last man to overreach a fellow myself, and hate a squabble—I'll take her *round* the turn, and then we'll settle.'

'You'll never get her there at this pace, surely,' observed the other, 'for it runs right off the hill at right angles; but if you do, you'll not find me complain about her price.'

It was indeed rather a difficult feat to perform, powerful as the black mare was; but it was better than attempting the impossibility of getting her down hill again; and it fortunately succeeded. One hundred and forty pounds were paid to Marsden for the 'set out' in that same by-road, and the young man, surrendering his property at once, got out of the vehicle, and walked away with a pleasant 'good-bye.' As he reached a neighbouring eminence, he could not refrain from a glance backward, to see how Black Bess carried her load of bricks back again. She

ventured a very few paces apparently with extreme reluctance, and upon her new purchaser's innocently applying the whip, she calmly laid herself down, and remained immovable. There seemed to be a considerable amount of shouting and passionate action, as it was ; but as Robert Marsden observed to himself, as he looked up at the gathering clouds, that state of excitement would be nothing to what would supervene in the evening, when the rain came down and washed the legs of Black Bess cleaner than was desirable.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

## A SERIOUS PIRATE.

HAVING thus achieved his main object, Marsden purchased another horse and cart at a reasonable rate in Melbourne, and lading them with his various purchases, retraced his steps with an exulting heart towards Marycross. Nor must we judge the young man too harshly for his want of penitence for the wrong he had done to the purchaser of his black mare. No man that has had much to do with horse-flesh is a moralist; and, moreover, Robert Marsden's principles were of that not uncommon sort which are dependent almost entirely upon circumstances. With two thousand a year, and a house in the country, his honesty would have remained irreproachable; but being poor, he was little better than one of the wicked. His conscience had peeled off with every shock of Fortune—not being protected by any effective moral buffer whatever—until there was but a very thin coating left of it indeed. It was essentially a conscience for fair weather; and the outside gloss of 'social position' being removed, the delicate fabric went to pieces with great rapidity. There was, however, no palliation for his chuckling as he did over his successful roguery, as he drove along. It whimsically occurred to him, that whatever might be said against the mare, must needs be exaggerated;

for he knew, and none better, that with all her faults, *she was not so black as she was painted*, and this doubtful *jeu d'esprit* afforded him fits of merriment. With money in his pocket, and with money-making in the building concern, and with having thoroughly outwitted a horse-dealer—with all things having worked, and working, well in short—why should not Mr. Robert Marsden have been hilarious? Alas, alas! Fate has the grimmest reasons of her own no mortal can fathom! Nemesis was awaiting the poor young fellow as he drove along with the smile upon his lips, and the blithe twinkle in his eye, evoked by the coming recital of his tricks to his appreciatory partner. Into what Limbo such never-fledged anticipations drop, we know not, but there has been certainly an enormous brood of them since credulous Eve ate of the apple, which might have grown by the Dead Sea for any good to be got from it. When Marsden reached Marycross late on the second evening, and after his fortnight's absence, there was no Miles Ripon to whom to tell his story, and no roof-tree to tell it under. Friend and home were alike departed, for poor Miles had been murdered and buried, and the house that had sheltered him was but a heap of cold wood-ashes. Marsden pulled up his new purchase upon her haunches, and surveyed the desolate scene with such a passion flaming in his heart as dried up, perhaps, certain springs of good in it for ever. Six months ago, he would have mourned the untimely fate of an only friend, and over the havoc which had been wrought upon what had been, upon the whole, a pleasant home; he

would have 'set the law in motion,' and placed the affair in the hands of the best detective; but now, and in Marycross, he released his jaded steed, and tied her to the nearest tree, looked carefully to the caps of his revolver, and took his way to the American quarter of the Diggers' camp. The moon shone brightly upon the half-dozen huts which formed the Yankee settlement, but there was no sign of life to be seen in any one of the first five; they presented the appearance of having been suddenly quitted by their inhabitants, but whether voluntarily or upon compulsion, it was impossible to tell; if the former, their absence would be only temporary, since cooking-vessels, and even uncooked food, lay about the floors and on the simple shelves. The sixth hut was similarly deserted by the living, but the shadow of a dead man suspended from a neighbouring tree fell across the lintel. When he had walked up to this ghastly figure and satisfied himself that it was indeed that of Mithridates Pontus Chips, Marsden drew the first full breath that he had drawn since he had become aware of the foul wrong that had been done to him and his.

'I knew you would come here,' said a low husky voice beside him, which his ears at once recognised as Old Simon's. 'I have waited here every night since it was done. They said you would surely come to the store and ask first, but I knew you better. I stood by the poor young fellow until they knocked me down with a pistol-but, but what was an old man like me against so many? It was at night—the second night after you left—when the



murdering thieves set on him, and we could get no help. I had shut up my store, and was at your house when it happened—for happen I knew it would—but we could get no one else to watch with us. They wanted *you*, they said; and since they could not find you, they shot poor Miles. He told Chips to his face that you would come back soon, and follow him as sure as death; and after the coward shot him, he would have fled the place for fear of you; I raised the station on him, however, and we Lynched him as you see. He died there whining and howling like a dog.'

'And the others?' inquired Marsden sternly, 'where are the rest?'

'They are hundreds of miles away by this time, beggars and outcasts; henceforth, no diggings are safe for them to dwell in, and we did not suffer them to take so much as a pannikin away with them. All that is here is yours—it was voted so—materials for a better hut than that which has been burnt; but I would persuade you, if I could, to dwell henceforth under my roof. All your goods, or nearly all, had been removed thither in safety. I got Ripon to let me have them in keeping the very day you left. Cheer up, my friend, cheer up, for you are young, and may do well yet.'

'Not here,' replied Marsden with a groan; 'not at Marycross, by the grave of my murdered friend—for he *was* my friend, and faithful and true to *me*. He has been avenged in part, and that was the sole work that could have delayed me in this accursed spot. I am sorry to part with you, old man! I thank you

kindly for what you have done, and what you have striven to do, and I will stay with you a day or two before I go, and while I make my final arrangements, if you are really so disposed. Pah!—let us leave this Carrion. How wretched is it that things so contemptible can do us so much evil!’

‘Ay, sir,’ said Old Simon, as they walked together slowly towards the store; ‘but we must remember that there is another side to that matter. The mouse sometimes assists the lion. The decayed, decrepit old man often supplies to youth the means of living in happiness and comfort. You would not guess, I reckon, that it is in my power, now, to place you, in all human probability, above the reach of Fortune’s malice.’

‘You have got some poison in your store, old man, I reckon,’ replied Marsden bitterly.

‘I have a secret, lad, to possess which most men of your age, ay, and some of mine, would hazard life and barter limb. I swear to you that I know where more than one hundred thousand pounds is to be had for the digging away of a few feet of river-sand; not in Australian nuggets, but in good coined gold of the Spanish empire.’

‘Can you tell me, by-the-by, what monies I have expended on your account since I was in Melbourne?’ answered Marsden quietly; ‘for I have had the misfortune to lose the memorandum.’

‘I can,’ replied the old man calmly, and evincing no astonishment at so abrupt a question; ‘and I will.’ And with that he went through the commissions with which he had entrusted Marsden, with the

correctness of one who has the invoice in his hands. 'I know,' said he, when he had finished, 'why you have demanded this of me; and I hope I have convinced you that Old Simon at least keeps his wits.'

'You have,' said Marsden gravely, 'and I believe you therefore; for I do not think you would wilfully lie to me. Do you mean to tell me more of this hidden treasure?'

'I will tell you this night, lad, this very night, for my time is getting short for telling of anything, and it has been upon my tongue to reveal it to you again and again. But for me this bloodshed would not have happened, and I owe you such reparation as lies in my power.'

They had reached the entrance of the store by this time, and Marsden was stepping in, when a curious proceeding of the old man drew his attention, and almost reproduced a suspicion of his want of sanity. Old Simon heaved up with some difficulty a huge flat stone which always lay at the door of the log-hut, poised it for a few minutes over his head, and then let it fall to the earth with a heavy thud.

'I came to this place at threescore-and-ten,' said he, observing the young man's look of wonder, 'when most men are thinking of their graves, and every evening, for eleven years, have I lifted up that stone to see how my strength decays. I have an especial reason in doing so this night, and have an especial pleasure in feeling that some strength yet remains to me.' Old Simon locked the door behind them, and producing two strange-shaped pipes, some rare

tobacco, and some excellent Hollands, observe an apology for the moonlight, that neither fire or candle could show whether a tale was true or and that for his part he preferred to spin a yarn in the dark.

The listening to him through the dead silence of that night, only broken by the hoarse voice of the ancient gray-beard, telling of things that happened before the young man's birth, but when the narrator himself had been even then a middle-aged man, seemed to his auditor to be like listening to the voice of Time itself. There were long pauses when Simon's breath grew short, or when, as it seemed, he was rejecting such experiences of his life as did not bear upon his present subject, and nothing was heard but sometimes for minutes saving the puffing at antique pipes with carven heads; but whether it was that the theory of Mr. Onslow Bateman concerning tobacco did really hold good, or whether the listener's personal interest in the subject was too great for weariness, certain it is the morning shone in upon the pair without exhibiting a trace of fatigue in either of them.

'It is unnecessary to commence three generations back,' began Old Simon, 'and to tell you what I did at your age, or what I did; to me, such a retrospect would not be pleasing, and to you, who only see me as I now am, it would be as though I talked of things in the third person with whom you had nought to do. Enough to say that I was a British seaman, and served with Nelson—"our Nelly," as we used to call him—in more than one engagement, but with w

the discipline of a man-of-war did not for long agree. I was a mutineer and a deserter. I was a privateersman, and then I was a pirate. I joined the famous Captain Mitchell in the Spanish Main, of whom, even at this distance of time, you must have heard—a man who fought under Carthagenian colours in the war against Spain, but who had always his black flag on board, with the death's-head and cross-bones, nevertheless. It was a wicked, cruel life we led, but it was a stirring one; one to which the risks and dangers of these Diggings are no more to be compared than is a puff of south wind to a tornado. I never thought of being sorry for anything then, nor of any duty save that to myself and to my captain; but when all one's companions are dead—half of them swinging still, too, in iron chains—one begins to think differently. Jack Bryde, Jefferson, and I, were, with the exception of Mitchell himself, the greatest dare-devils, if not the worst, of all our crew. That drew us four together perhaps, for companionships are often forged of very queer metal. Our station was in the Caribbean Sea and off the mouth of the Magdalena River, when news came to the captain, by a certain hand, of a vast booty that might be gotten by a few determined fellows such as we were, and he confided it to us. Less than four could not possibly have managed the matter; more than four would have seriously diminished the shares of the plunder, for every able-bodied man amongst us had an equal profit, whether he was on the quarter-deck or before the mast, and therein lay the great charm in the life of a bucanier. The captain

might shoot you down like a dog, and would do so if you disobeyed him in action, or so much as muttered at his commands while at sea ; but we all had a voice in the sailing orders—as to where we should watch for prizes, and when we should go into port—and were all equal, one with another, except on rare occasions. We four, then, were to make this expedition, unknown to and independently of the ship's company, and to take the risks and profits on our own heads. The great news consisted in this : that the people in the interior, becoming alarmed at the disturbed state of the country, were sending away their gold home to Spain ; and in particular, that a large treasure was coming down the Magdalena in canoes the ensuing night from Santa Fé de Bogotá, to be shipped on board of a Spanish man-of-war which would be waiting for it at the river-mouth.

That same evening, therefore, we took one of the ship's boats, and, armed to the teeth, sailed up ten miles or so, and there waited all next day, in hiding, upon the right bank of the river. It would have seemed a wild eerie place enough, I daresay, if the errand we had come upon had been less important and risky, and we could have thought about anything else. The banks of the river were pierced by long winding creeks, running into swampy lagoons, with low black islands in them, which were, however, nothing but vast masses of water-fowl, that would rise with clangour and flutter as we approached, and then settle again at a little distance on. Hundreds of pelicans, gaunt sentries of all this watery wilderness, fished on by the river-side as we went by,

as though they knew our business had nothing to do with theirs ; and alligators in swarms swam lazily about our boat, or lay like dirty logs under the roots of the few mango-trees by the creek-sides. Above the creeks, the luxuriant vegetation sometimes formed a complete arch, and it did so in our hiding-place ; but except the mango-trees, there was no tree in sight save one—a tamarind-tree close by upon our left. You must remember well that tamarind, lad, for it has golden roots ! Presently, from our place of concealment, we saw one of the large canoes of the country coming slowly down-stream, from the direction of Santa Fé. These are about fifty feet long and five wide, and are generally manned by some half-dozen natives. There were six on board of this one, beside a Spanish commander, or *Padrone*, in charge of the treasure. About twenty feet of the centre of the canoe was covered over with a framework of poles, and thatched with mats, but the Boxes in search of which we had come were placed on the open deck. At sight of these, we looked to the priming of our pistols, loosened our cutlasses in their sheaths, pulled swiftly out of cover upon the doomed canoe, and boarded her like incarnate fiends. Mitchell shot down the Spaniard, I myself killed two of the poor natives, and the other four wretched creatures took to the water, and were picked off by our guns as soon as they shewed their heads. In ten minutes we had murdered seven of our fellow-creatures—not in cold blood, indeed, but in blood madly heated with the passionate desire for gold ; and for all that sin we laid upon our souls, and despite

that blood-watering, our work was fated after all to bear (at least for us) no fruit whatever. The canoe was scarcely ours, and had drifted but a little way down the stream, when we heard the measured stroke of a man-of-war's launch coming up the river. We knew at once that it came from the Spanish vessel, and had been sent to meet that very boat we had just captured. We turned the head of the unwieldy craft as fast as we could, and lowering the sail, lest it should attract their eyes, even in that dim moonlight, we put out the long sweeps, and pulled away as fast as we could, with our little boat in tow, into the sheltering creek. Through the leafy canopy we watched the great launch go by, so near that we could even hear the disappointment expressed at the weary distance the rowers had to pull to meet the treasure, and their curses upon the sluggish boatmen, who were lying dead in the stream beneath them while they spoke.

As soon as she had gone by, we carried the gold to land with a great deal of difficulty; it was in eight enormous boxes, each weighing about two hundred and fifty pounds, made of thick planks of cedar, and bound with green hide. We had little time to lose, but we could not forbear from bursting one of these open with our cutlasses, and laying bare its precious contents. We found it full of Spanish gold doubloons, with their edges packed so closely together that Jefferson had to prise one out with his clasp-knife in order to loosen the row. To have carried any quantity of it away in our then circumstances would have been madness, but each of us



took a handful of the coin and filled our pockets with it. Then we dug a vast hole in the light sand with our oar-blades, and buried the whole of the treasure beneath the tamarind-tree. That was more than a score of years ago, lad ; but, to the best of my belief, that money has never since been fingered by mortal hand. We scuttled the canoe, and sank her, and rowed out cautiously to the mouth of the river in our own boat. Our thoughts, in spite of our great danger, were all running upon the mighty fortune each one had obtained for himself, and upon what each would do with it. I remember *my* notion was, that I would be no more a pirate, but would make my last home in peaceful Devonshire—where my first had been—and within hearing of those old cathedral chimes. Only when Jack Bryde spoke of what he would do at Carthagena, and all the vice and folly he meant to plunge in, I said that I would join him, for one, for my good intentions were so extremely new that I was ashamed of them.

‘All of a sudden, as we neared the river-mouth, where the sea breaks into huge rollers, and vast logs and pieces of wood are thrown up by it momentarily, all along that coast-line, Mitchell made us pause, and bade us each swear that none would venture back to the treasure unless in company with the others, as well as call down curses upon ourselves if any such thought was harbouring in our breasts. At this, Jefferson began to blaspheme like a madman, saying that he was not one who would ever play false with his friends, and that might he die if he had ever meant otherwise. And it was strange enough that,

in the midst of this, he fell down in the bottom of the boat, as if with a sun-stroke, although it was near midnight, and presently yelled so, that we were afraid his cries would attract the attention of the Spanish watch on board the vessel round which we had to creep before we could approach our own. He was dead, poor fellow—the first of the four to go—within five hours after we were on board, of yellow fever, and did not enjoy his golden secret long. After that, we had seven days of the most dreadful storm that I ever remember; we lay-to for all that time with the smallest possible amount of canvas, and with the helm lashed. Not only were the windows of Heaven opened as though for a second Deluge—and there could certainly have been no wickeder folks in the first world than were our ship's company—but, for minutes, the whole sky was fenced off into black patches of cloud by zigzag hedges of lightning, like great fiery snakes diving into the sea, which in their course downward sent up lesser snakes from every fork of them. Sometimes on the tops of the masts and down the stays, small balls of the same electric fire were to be seen, which with the lightning would so illuminate space, that for a second or two every rope and spar could be seen; after which the darkness could be felt again oppressive as a weight.

‘I am no coward now, lad, and certainly had steady nerves at the time I speak of, but I was fairly scared. It seemed to me as though a curse had fallen upon us through butchering the crew of that canoe; and every night I dreamed of it, and seemed

to have one of those cedar-boxes, bound with green hide, lying on my heart. I told Mitchell of it, who cursed me for a lily-livered fool, and bade me calculate what eight boxes of gold, weighing two hundred and fifty pounds or so, would come to in London at fifty sovereigns the pound. A hundred thousand pounds is a great sum, it is true, but it cannot bring content, I reckon, nor even purchase a man sleep o' nights. If I had had it and spent it, I could not have felt more regretful about that money, although, indeed, it was fair enough booty, since we were at open war with the Dons. We got safe out of the storm, but it was only to fall into Spanish hands, near St. Thomas, where Captain Mitchell and seven of our men, who were recognised as notorious pirates, were hung. I saw their bones hanging there months afterwards, and heard them dancing in the wind in their iron fetters. There are no bucaniers or pirates in those parts now, I am told ; and it is likely that I am the very last of that evil race. Jack Bryde and I were prisoners like the rest, and being taken to the mainland, were carried about the country with the troops for six months and more, always in company. At last we made our escape together in a small boat, and put to sea, when the brig *Fortune*, of St. John's, New Brunswick, picked us up, and brought us to that port in safety. There we got our living for a very long time how we could ; I for my part happier than I had been for many a day, only Bryde was always harping upon the buried treasure by the Magdalena River, and urging me to go with him and dig it up.

At last, more to please him than because I had any great desire for it myself, I agreed to take advantage with him of a vessel about to sail for Jamaica, from which island an opportunity would probably occur of our getting to Carthagená or Santa Martha. Jack Bryde was in great spirits that I had given my consent to this, although unwillingly; and upon the eve of the ship's sailing drank pretty hard, and came down to Reid's Point — where we were to embark — very light-headed. When I got there, I remembered that I had left my tobacco behind; and as there was still time enough, I went back for it, and was away about an hour. On my return, I met some sailors carrying out something from the vessel, whose sails were just beginning to be spread. This was the dead body of my poor mate, Jack Bryde, who had fallen over the side of the vessel, and struck his head against the boat alongside. Then I feared that this was the judgment of God upon us still, and that I must needs be the one to suffer next. Instead, then, of going by that ship, I took passage in an Australian bark, and landed in the New World, there to live, I hoped, a new life and a better one to the end of my days. Until I saw you, I never wished to entrust anyone with this golden secret, and far less to enrich myself. I have seen no less evil come of much money since I have been here, than when I was on the Spanish Main. You, however, are different from most men; you will know what to do with a sum like this: it will reinstate you, perhaps, in a regretted and lost position. I see that I read your hopes aright, lad.

Well, did I not tell you that what seems but a weak helpless creature can sometimes do a strong man good service ? It is almost always worth one's while to do a kindness ; and you see what you have done for me already bears at least some promise.'

'A hundred thousand pounds !' muttered Robert Marsden ; 'that is a fortune indeed !'

'Ay, my good lad, and all to be got by digging away a little sand under a certain tamarind-tree on the Magdalena River.'

'And how shall I find the tamarind-tree ?' inquired the young man gravely.

'I have still some little strength, as I said, lad ; and sooner than money which might do so much good should be lost for ever, I will even go with you myself,' answered Old Simon.

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## CHAPTER XIX.

## LITERATURE AND POLITICS AT THE MANOR.

ALTHOUGH Robert Marsden and Ellen Bateman were breathing 'in converse seasons,' time was advancing with each at the same rapid stride. She took no account of time save by its *gain*, by how much nearer it might be bringing to her the man she loved; while he took no account of it at all, considering so much of his life as lost which was spent so far from the sun of prosperity, and from all which was pleasing to his nature. He wrote to her pretty regularly (the only correspondent that he had, for his father had died about the time that he himself had landed in the New World), not with burning ardour indeed—for how ridiculous would be his position if that prolonged letter-carriage should at last terminate in the person of Lady Ryder instead of Miss Ellen Bateman, a possibility to which he could never quite shut his eyes—but with affection and tenderness; making blithely light of his privations, and always ending with the assurance of his final prosperity. He was too proud to confess of failure even to her he loved best. These letters, easily, not to say thoughtlessly written, were the young lady's chief mental food; pored over again and again, with all the attention of a commentator, lest some divine meaning of the writer's should

by any means be let slip; treasured with all the loving selfishness of a literary antiquary, who has some ancient manuscript, of small importance perhaps, as some might think, but his own and his only, out of which he will vouchsafe scraps to certain favoured persons, but never—no never—suffer the precious document to leave his hands, or to be perused by the eyes of others.

Many months, even years, had gone by since the two parted, but she retained the memory of his farewell look as though it had been given yesterday, and the impress of his loving lips as fresh and perfect. Nobody had kissed her since; for one's father and sister, in such a case, of course, are nobodies, and indeed, even of those, Mr. Onslow Bateman, was not very demonstrative in that way, but rather preferred the being kissed by others; and we are not prepared to say—with such an authority as his upon the other side—but that the passive sensation has not even a greater pleasantness about it than the active. Little Miss Ryder kissed Ellen, it is true, every morning and evening, but it was rather a lip-tangent than a kiss which *she* administered. Men could not possibly have shaken hands as those two saluted each other. The fingers would certainly have refused their office, and only an open slap with the palms have been accomplished. Women who don't love one another can, however, behave in a wonderfully affectionate and sisterly way, and substitute 'My dear' for 'You hussy' with great dexterity and naturalness. They neither deceive each other nor themselves by these delicate

hypocrisies, it is true, but rather embitter their mutual relations; and when they get to bed, narrate to their confidantes what an artful puss that girl is, or how that that dreadful old woman is as false as her front-hair. Miss Ryder, who would have cried with vexation had Ellen been engaged to the baronet, was indignant beyond measure because she had slighted his addresses, and preferred somebody else. According to the little old lady, nothing was good enough for her Charley; and, indeed, she had reason to think well of the honest young fellow. She was one of those persons rarely found out of England, who, though very intimately connected with wealthy people, are left, through family pride and love of hereditary grandeur, almost entirely unprovided for. A home at Rudesleigh, which had been impossible to her during the late baronet's time—who had made the manor utterly scandalous by his manner of life there—was offered to her at once upon Sir Charles's succession to the place; and if he had at first thought more of the necessity of having a lady to keep house for him, while the Misses Bateman were his guests, than of obliging a relative with whom he was but scantily acquainted, she was now, at all events, mistress of the hall in her own right, having obtained the sincere and affectionate regard of her nephew.

She had none of that jealousy which would have filled most female bosoms at the idea of a race of strangers like the Batemans occupying the manor house so long. It was right that dear Charles should consult his own happiness in every respect,



and it was scarcely to be wondered at that Mr. Onslow Bateman should be necessary to that happiness; for surely so accomplished a person, thought little Miss Ryder, did not—out of the atmosphere of a court—exist. He would be just as agreeable, just as polite, just as enchanting, in a word, to an old woman like herself, as she sat knitting muffettees—an occupation she most diligently pursued even in the height of summer—in her low arm-chair in the drawing-room, as he ever showed himself to be to the most brilliant of the young ladies of the county. As to Miss Florence, her own darling Florence! Heaven forbid that anything should ever happen to take *her* away from Rudesleigh; and she looked upon that young lady's attempts to achieve independence as a species of insubordination, in spite of being convinced by her superior powers of controversial argument. 'If I had a son,' thought Miss Ryder, a supposititious case to which she would frequently give utterance, to her nephew's intense amusement, 'Florence Bateman is the girl above all others whom I should like for a daughter-in-law.' The only apprehension that *she* felt about that dear girl's future was, that she would never make a thoroughly good knitter or netter (for Miss Ryder was great in both those arts). Florence had too heterodox a method—very likely from having so much writing-work—of holding her fingers. But the old lady would not have had her give up her writing either, even to obtain excellence in those sublime acquirements. Little Miss Ryder's happiest moments were spent in listening

to Florence's manuscript verses, which never failed to draw copious tears and rust her knitting-needles. They were not perhaps always very discriminating tears, but they welled up from a heart full of love, and would have gained her entrance into Paradise, even if she had not long ago earned her admission-ticket in a hundred different ways. It is our private belief, indeed—and it must be certainly granted, that she did not at all give one the impression of one of Mr. Thomas Moore's Peris—that our dear, kind-hearted Miss Ryder had never been turned out of Paradise at all.

It was her custom, every Saturday morning after breakfast, to drink at the Pierian Spring 'turned on' by Florence Bateman in the boudoir from her rather voluminous 'commonplace-book;' for that title was printed somewhat obtrusively at the back of the sacred volume, since, like most young poets, she had a shame as well as a pride in her divine vocation. Although Florence was always pleased to read her productions—for the sweet girl was but human after all—the balance of satisfaction certainly lay on the side of the elder lady; *her* pleasure had no sort of alloy, whereas her inopportune sympathies and interpolatory remarks sometimes discomfited the young authoress not a little. The good old lady had never written a verse in her life, and did not understand what infinitesimal vibrations will shock the souls attuned to harmony. She made nothing of getting up to shut the window, upon pretence of a draught, no matter how thrilling the passage in recitation; and if she dropped her needle, she would

either obviously give up her whole mind to the finding of it, with a laborious pretence of not doing so, which was harassing in the extreme, or would flop down upon her knees at once, before the unfortunate Poetess could arrive at a proper halting-place. It always seemed to Florence, indeed, that these interruptions took place just where the pathos was most pathetic, and the sentiments required the deepest and most sustained attention ; while the total unconsciousness of crime in the offender was perhaps the hardest to bear of all.

It is a Saturday morning, and Miss Ryder is, as usual, in the Temple of the Muses, with the Priestess about to commence the opening rhyme. There is something in the latter's aspect, on this particular occasion, which to acuter eyes would perhaps betoken a mind not ill at ease ; but the old lady has not got her spectacles fitted to her satisfaction, and is setting them right with her forefinger ; and then there is the netting to take up at the proper place, so the look is not observed ; therefore Florence, after a little hesitation within herself, determines to postpone her communication till the morning's work is over : it is so disagreeable to begin an unpleasant subject without so much introduction as ' What is the matter ? ' or, ' What makes you look so pale, my love ? ' Yes ; she will wait a little.

' Well, Florence, and what is it this morning, my darling ? What is the name of the poem, please, before you begin ? I always like to know the name

of it first, because it helps one so to find out what the poetry means; does it not, dear?’

‘I daresay it does,’ replied Florence laughing; ‘but I don’t think that ought to be necessary, and I am afraid it’s the poet’s fault if it is, my dear Miss Ryder. I am afraid, too, the name will not very much help anybody this time. It is called *Where is He?*’

The little old lady put down her work upon her knees, and sliding her gold spectacles a little way down her nose, looked over the tops of them in unaffected wonder at her companion. ‘Dear me, what a very extraordinary title, my love! Why, it’s more like a question than a title, isn’t it now? Where is he? Where is *who?*’

‘Well, dearest,’ replied Florence, still laughing, though a little damped at not being able to get past the very title of her poem, ‘it is about somebody who is supposed not to exist, but who, we yet hope, will do so some day, you know.’

‘Oh, thank you; now I see,’ said the old lady, replacing her glasses, and setting to work with an air of great contentment; ‘I see now quite easily; to be sure; how stupid of me. Why, of course, that evidently means a Baby!’

‘No, it does not, indeed,’ exclaimed Florence indignantly; ‘it’s nothing of the sort; it’s a—it’s a—— It’s impossible, indeed, to tell what it is without reading the whole poem, however. It is a very short one, I promise you.’

‘I wish it was longer,’ said the old lady rapturously. ‘Pray, begin, love.’

‘Very well, then, this is the first line :

*There are, I trust, who love me well,  
The kindly hearts about my home’—*

‘I should think there were,’ exclaimed the listener, producing her pocket-handkerchief; ‘why, we all love you; of course we do: what nonsense talking about *trust*; you *know* we do. That is very pretty, though—“The kind of hearts about my home.”’

*‘The kindly hearts about my home,’*

reiterated the Poetess with great distinctness.

*‘For all that smile and speech can tell  
Of gracious thought, I need not roam.  
Such friendly deeds are rarely done  
As my kind friends have done for me;  
I count them not by one and one,  
And there are more I do not see.  
I know, God help me, I have nought  
Of worth within, or rich desert’—*

‘How can you write such dreadful stories, Florence?’ cried the old lady, wiping first her eyes and then her spectacles. ‘No worth, indeed! God help you! Why, of course, he’ll help you. But I am interrupting you, I know; and it’s all so beautiful, only I am longing so to come to *him*.’

*‘I know, God help me, I have nought  
Of worth within, or rich desert  
Whereon might Pride boast, “This is bought;”  
My moods are shifting, manners curt’—*

‘Manners what?’ inquired the little old lady sharply.

Florence, not without a blush, repeated the mendacious adjective.

‘Curt? The very best manners I ever saw, my dear child, not excepting even those of your accomplished father. If anybody else had written such a thing of you, I should have said it was libellous.’

*‘What right have I, thus knowing all,  
Keen-conscious of this weighty debt,  
To see but dreary void—the Pall  
Of the dead friend I never met?  
To shudder lest, in years to come  
—But few, I feel, and swift, I pray’—*

‘Then you are a very, very wicked child, indeed,’ exclaimed the little old lady sobbing. ‘But, pray, go on; it’s very pleasant, and makes me cry like I don’t know what.’

*‘I dream again some heart my home,  
And wake to curse the truthful day?  
I know not: but’—*

Here the attention of the somewhat abstruse Poetess was drawn, in spite of herself, to her auditor, whose feet had got out of her netting-stirrup, and who was attempting to recover the same by a series of gymnastic manœuvres, intended to be unobserved, but which were, in reality, obtrusive in a very high degree. ‘I beg your pardon, my love: ah, that’s it at last!’ cried she, successfully sliding her foot into its usual receptacle; ‘I wouldn’t have stopped you on any account. Pray, go on.’

*‘I know not: but could such be found  
As Heaven hath given, and hath to give,  
Methinks he’d lift me from the ground,  
And teach my sin-fraught soul to live.’*

And that 's all,' observed the Poetess in conclusion, and to remove any doubt upon that point which might remain in the mind of her auditor; for certainly nothing is more unpleasant than the 'Well, and what then?' or the 'What are you stopping about, my dear?' when one has really reached the end of one's poetical tether, and as we had fondly imagined, with some little success in the way of *finish*. 'That 's all, dear, and how do you like it?'

'I think it's charming, love; most charming, I do assure you. And I am so pleased to find what *He* turns out to be after all.'

'I am *so* glad,' exclaimed Florence with quite a little blush of pride, 'for I was afraid you would have found it a little difficult. I know the poem is not so clear as it ought to be; and sometimes, indeed, I am tempted to believe in my dear old editor, who tells me that Prose is my vocation rather than Verse. But it would have been hard to tell who it was that one wanted—the sort of ideal friend who seems so needful—without reading you the whole poem. Did you guess who it was, soon, my dear Miss Ryder?'

'Yes, dearest, of course I did: I had it at almost the very first starting; for what makes young ladies discontented with their friends, and all that belongs to them, but the want of a Lover? I have felt it myself once upon a time, although you may not believe it. Of course, you meant a husband, a *Mr. Wright*, as Charley calls him. *Where is He*, indeed? I'm sure I wish I knew.'

Nor, in spite of all the poor girl's blushes and pro-

testations, would little Miss Ryder accept of any less obvious interpretation of this transcendental poem.

The controversy, however, afforded that opportunity for which Florence had been waiting, to speak upon a certain subject which was oppressing her mind.

‘Talking of lovers,’ said she, ‘do you know that my sister Ellen has had great news this morning?’

‘Indeed,’ replied the old lady, in a voice so quiet and so cold, that it might have belonged to anybody rather than the impassioned and affectionate speaker of a few moments before; ‘I hope it’s good news.’

‘Robert Marsden is coming home immediately; is probably on his way to England at this moment.’

‘Oh,’ replied little Miss Ryder, without any display of excitement even at such intelligence as that.

‘And he returns after three years’ absence with a very large fortune.’

‘Then I suppose it *is* good news,’ observed the implacable old lady.

‘I cannot tell that,’ said Florence sorrowfully; ‘I only hope for the best. There must be a great deal of good in Mr. Marsden, since almost everybody likes him, and my dear sister certainly loves him with all her heart.’

The interest which little Miss Ryder took in her netting during this part of the conversation was so intense and absorbing that she was quite startled—being in no way prepared for such a spectacle—when a beautiful face, all wet with tears, looked up to her suddenly from her own lap, and Florence Bateman



besought her, on her knees, to be less hard with sister Ellen, and not to strive to steel against her a heart that was meant to be touched by all sorrows of the young.

‘My dear Florence, I am sure I did not know that your sister had a sorrow,’ replied she, a little mollified; ‘I am glad to hear that she has more feeling than I gave her credit for. I can, however, do nothing for her that I know of in the way of comfort. Why doesn’t she learn netting, now?’

‘You can do something for her, and for me too,’ said Florence coaxingly; ‘you can beg Sir Charles to ask Mr. Marsden to Rudesleigh.’

‘And why can’t she ask Charles herself? No, that wouldn’t do, to be sure, silly, wrong-headed girl that she is. But why shouldn’t *you* ask him, Florence? I am sure you would only have to hint at such a wish.’

‘I’d rather not, I’d much rather not,’ returned the girl with heightened colour. ‘My—that is, our obligations to Sir Charles are already too deep. That is one of the reasons why I am anxious that this marriage—since it is to be—should take place as soon as possible. Is it not enough, my dear good friend, to say, “I wish it; pray, do this for my sake?”’

‘It is, my love,’ returned the old lady; ‘and I will do your bidding; but it is not a pleasant mission, is it, to get poor Charley to ask the young man down to Rudesleigh to marry the girl whom he has set his own heart upon?’

‘That was a very long time ago,’ observed Flo-

rence quietly; 'and besides, they are two such old friends.'

'Friends, and in love with the same girl!' remarked the little old lady scornfully. 'Well, for my part, I don't believe in such friendships,' Then, kissing the beautiful face which still looked up at her with gentle reproach, she added, tenderly: 'But there, it is no satisfaction to one to be in a passion in your company, Florence, and I won't be a cross old woman any more.'

Marsden and Ryder had not parted on very cordial terms, it is true, for each had a grievance against the other; the former had been too successful in love, and the latter in money-getting; but both these causes of jealousy were now removed. The young baronet had given up all thoughts of obtaining Ellen Bateman for his bride, from the instant that she had given him plainly to understand that her affections were pledged to his friend. He had suffered as most men with strong feelings do suffer—for to how few of us does it happen to marry our first love?—but its healthy nature soon recovered itself. He forgave most freely, most generously, in convincing himself that he had nothing to forgive; but he did not forget, insomuch that to secure her happiness who could never be wife of his, he would have made any personal sacrifice. To continue his intimacy with her future husband was the surest method of making himself of use to her, should any necessity arise; and besides that, though he distrusted the young man's stability

of character—thought him but too likely, as he expressed it, ‘to go a regular mucker’—he had a real regard for the companion of that happiest epoch in his life, the palmy days of Lakeland and young love.

Miss Ryder, therefore, to her great astonishment, found her nephew quite willing, and even pleased to invite Robert Marsden to Rudesleigh; and it was understood that the young millionaire from over seas was to come thither as soon as he landed.

There were two other persons at the manor-house beside Charles and Ellen who looked forward to the young Australian’s arrival with considerable interest—Mr. Onslow Bateman and Mr. Hardy Wentworth. This latter gentleman would have been considered by most listeners, no matter what topic his eloquence chanced to be adorning, what is called ‘a superior man.’ He was not very much better on one subject than another, and, indeed, greatly prided himself upon having no sort of sympathy with any subject. He was an aristocrat in so far as he despised all persons of low condition, and who were not ‘in society;’ and he was a democrat, insomuch as he hated people with handles to their names, whom the world would ignorantly worship in preference to Mr. Hardy Wentworth. He had even by no means a high opinion of his own ‘set,’ intellectual men about town, fast philosophers, and persons of condition, who ‘fed upon sauces,’ political, theological, and literary, and despised plain roast and boiled; nor, with many acquaintances and several sycophants, was Mr. Hardy Went-

at the residences of his aristocratic friends. The possession of a billiard-table is not a bad test for separating the upper landed gentry from the lower, and is certainly a much more practical and satisfactory one than any distinction to be found in Burke. The billiard-room of Rudesleigh was sacred from the profanation of smoke in the daytime; but every evening, as Mr. Bateman was wont to observe, Civilisation reasserted itself there in the finest regalias.

'The *Vampire*, a political and literary paper, whose object will be to point out the errors of modern journalism, and to protect the public morality,' observed Mr. Wentworth, quoting from its prospectus, and missing an easy white hazard, 'may be obtained on Friday next at all news-vendors.'

'The proprietary,' observed Mr. Onslow Bateman, continuing the quotation with great gravity, while in the act of attempting a cannon off three cushions, 'have no pecuniary aim whatever, but will direct their efforts solely to the elevation of opinion.'

'By Jove,' cried Wentworth, 'that's a bold stroke; and what a game it leaves!'

'Yes,' returned Mr. Bateman, taking advantage of the improved position of the balls; 'I'm afraid that makes the necessary fifty,' and he put the red ball into one pocket and the third half-crown he had won from Mr. Wentworth into another. 'I break the balls, then; and by the by, who writes your first leader?'

'Verjuice leads off with a stinger against Derby.'

'Poor fellow!' observed Mr. Bateman pathetically. 'See, they're both in balk, and you have little or nothing to play at.'

'Lord John is left for me,' pursued Wentworth; 'and Cracker is to pitch into Pam.'

'I thought there were to be four leaders—or misleaders, as perhaps will be remarked by the vapid and irreflective—who writes the fourth?'

'Verjuice, again, I think; but whoever of us is the most bilious is always to write the fourth article: it is the one we are to keep perpetually standing against Quaker Bright.'

'That is correcting the errors of journalism with a vengeance. And how about the protection of the public morality?'

'Well, that is to be done mainly by the literary staff; their censorship is to be tolerably severe, I understand. Cracker has given us one capital notion: at least one of the books selected for review is to be immoral. We shall only quote for purposes of rebuke, of course; but we *shall* quote. It is melancholy to think how the highly educated classes relish anything with a *soupçon* of impropriety about it. Among the lower classes, it is said that a newspaper without police reports would never circulate at all; but we are going to leave *them* out altogether, you know, "from motives which the proprietary trust will not be unappreciated."

'And where do you get your general news from?'

'From well-paid and intelligent correspondents over the whole world—the correspondents, that is, of the *Times* newspaper.'

'Excellent,' observed Mr. Bateman smiling, 'and not expensive. Your staff, then, is completely made up, is it?'

'It is not, nor is it meant to be,' returned Mr. Hardy Wentworth. 'Our contributors will be more numerous and varied than ever newspaper had before; because our columns will always be open to the expression—no matter from what quarter—of manly politics and rigorous criticism.'

'Slasher and Crasher, eh?' remarked Mr. Onslow Bateman as he put away his cue, and lit his bedroom candle. 'Upon my word, the scheme looks extremely promising, and particularly if we can get our young Australian millionaire to help it.'

The success of the *Vampire* was indeed, as had been predicted by the sagacious Mr. Hardy Wentworth, in a very few months pronounced complete; not only by the proprietary, who published its stamp-returns in every number, in very readable type, but by the public, whose morals it protected, and by the press, whose errors it corrected. Everybody abused it, it is true; called it 'too bad' and 'shameful,' 'unprincipled' and 'inconsistent;' but still the very folks who wondered most 'how anybody could read it,' read it themselves. It was for no little time the theme of political conversation; all the newspapers extracted its articles, for each found in the columns of the *Vampire* a philippic directed against the peculiar object of its own animosity; while the Wits averred that they had confidence in its French articles, since they were manifestly written in gall,

and declared a policy to be unnecessary to a journal which could insure its life without one.

Notwithstanding which, the following conversation took place at Rudesleigh Manor one evening concerning this most prosperous print.

‘I wonder, my dear Ryder,’ observed Hardy Wentworth, who had been extracting for the young baronet’s delectation, some exquisite passages from that still novel venture—‘I wonder you don’t patronise our journal yourself. It would be that object in life for you which you seem to me so much to want.’

‘Thank you,’ replied Ryder, drily. ‘Whatever void there may be in my poor existence’—he began to stammer and blush in an unaccountable manner, so that the ex-tutor had to intervene, with, ‘Wentworth thinks a void in one’s existence is like a broken window, which you can stuff a copy of the *Vampire* into, and so remedy.’

‘He does,’ asserted the extricated baronet, laughing; ‘and besides, each of you has a copy sent him of that paper, as it is. If every country-house takes in as many as this, the *Vampire* must be a pretty good property.’

‘We get it rather cheap, you see,’ observed Wentworth grimly; ‘and there are a good many who obtain it upon the same very reasonable terms.’

Mr. Onslow Bateman laughed loud and long, as though Mirth itself were tickling at his heart-strings, and in a manner scarcely to have been expected of one who had sunk his entire savings—all the property he had in the world—in the journal under

discussion. 'What *I* complain of in the *Vampire*,' said he, with tears in his eyes, 'is its enormous stamp-returns.'

'But that must be a good sign, surely,' observed Ryder simply.

'Not if you have to buy the stamps, and yet not sell the copies,' exclaimed Hardy Wentworth. 'The fact is, nobody will read a newspaper unless they are previously convinced that everybody else reads it: a great circulation must be first arrived at, and then people begin to take it in.'

'That is something like the sucker of my old pump in the back-yard,' observed Ryder: 'you must make it a little dampish at first, before it draws. If your pump doesn't work after all, the water with which you fed it would be all thrown away, I fear.'

'Which would be a pity, where water is scarce,' replied Wentworth, shrugging his shoulders, and playing the devil's tattoo on the great bay-window.

'And yet,' observed Mr. Bateman in a confidential voice, 'it seems ridiculous, after having dug so deep, to lose all for the sake of a few bucketsful. It is "letting Well alone" with a vengeance, and in a most unusual sense.'

'There is also another proverb,' remarked Ryder drily, 'concerning the imprudence of throwing good money after bad.'

'Ours is not absolutely bad,' argued Mr. Bateman, with unusual earnestness; 'I could show you the books, and let you see how the whole thing stands, if you wish. Our success at first was enormous, really enormous; the late decrease in our circulation



is one of those unaccountable phenomena which *will* occur in journalism; and in the meantime our stamp-returns must be kept up, or else we lose our advertisements. Our writing is just as good as ever. No human being can account for these aberrations.'

'I don't know that,' replied Ryder doubtfully; 'it seems to me the thing is not so unnatural. At the first start of a universally abusive paper, it pleases more persons than it disgusts; but presently, when everybody's turn has come round to be ill-treated, it disgusts more people than it pleases. There are also—although Wentworth yonder denies it—not a few persons in the world who have no relish for—  
for'——

'Bitter aloes,' suggested Mr. Onslow Bateman gloomily.

'Exactly,' responded Ryder, with a smile at the candid admission. 'I own to you that if it were not for the personal interest you two gentlemen take in it, I would not have such a paper brought into my house.'

Over Mr. Onslow Bateman's countenance there passed a sudden expression of positive anguish—agony; a look totally foreign to anything Ryder had ever beheld in that pleasant face before. It was only for a moment, and was succeeded by the ex-tutor's ordinary placid smile; but the beholder never forgot it. In after years, he likened it to the peering forth of that fox's head whom the Spartan would have hidden from every eye, though it was gnawing his very vitals. At the time, he was shocked to think

that his outspokening might have produced it, and was hastening to express his sorrow; but Mr. Bateman stopped him merrily with: 'Tush, tush, my friend; you are perhaps right enough, and, at all events, could never hurt, with even a just sarcasm, such a rhinoceros as myself. I confess, however, I am disappointed; for I had hoped you would have joined us, and saved the sinking ship with some of your floating capital.'

'My dear friend,' replied Ryder earnestly, 'I would not lend one farthing for any such purpose. If *you*, however, desire to borrow of me, I need not say that what money I have to spare is at your service; nor is it any concern of mine to what use or abuse you put it.' Here, as if unwilling to prolong a discussion that was agreeable to neither party, the young baronet left the room; and Mr. Hardy Wentworth, who had been keeping up a continued stream of melodious whistling in the bay-window throughout the foregoing conversation, stopped his song as suddenly as any thrush who sees a worm, to ask: 'How is it, Bateman; is the *Vampire* to live on?'

'It is,' replied the ex-tutor with all his customary cheerfulness of voice and manner; 'the creature is to have more blood to suck.'

## CHAPTER XX.

## THE FINDING OF THE TREASURE.

OLD Simon and young Marsden were getting on at Marycross as prosperously as any Storekeeper—except some government ones—and any Builder—totally independent of strikes—could be expected to do; but the young man was far from satisfied. Waking or sleeping, the vision of the buried treasure in the river-sand was ever present to him, and every shilling not absolutely necessary to his present wants was laid by for the expenses of a long and unknown voyage. He had begun, as we saw, with almost total incredulity in the old man's story, but during the intervening twelvemonth had gradually persuaded himself of the solid reality of this new and marvellous Golden Legend. Nor was the change without some reasonable explanation. By obtaining, at infinite cost and trouble, such works as bore upon the history of the Spanish Main and South American Republics, he had found the dates of different minute occurrences which old Simon had spoken of to correspond exactly with his narration: the period of Captain Mitchell's execution in particular was correct to a day, and that was not certainly a circumstance likely to be remembered save by an eye-witness, or one deeply interested in the circumstances, nor to be picked up by any ordinary

inquirer, like the martyrdom of a calendared saint. When we, moreover, consider that Marsden very vehemently desired to believe in his venerable friend's tidings, it is not surprising that after so much corroboration he at last obtained his wish. It was on the night of the anniversary of the first narration of his story that the old man came in from his usual gymnastic exercise with the big stone, and touched Robert Marsden's shoulder as he was looking over his cash-accounts for the past year.

'My friend,' said he, 'if you are content with your present gains, which are large, and with the rest of the property in this hut, which will be yours in a little time, God forbid that I should urge you to start upon a difficult and dangerous enterprise, with perhaps disappointment at the end of it. If, however, you design to take advantage of my help in your search for this treasure, I must warn you that the time is short. My strength is failing, visibly, even to one who would fain believe himself above the malice of time. I am now become that unhappy wretch of whose existence the ancient writer doubted—a man so old that he does not think he can live a year.'

'And where did you learn that, Simon?' inquired Marsden earnestly, diverted momentarily, by the old man's unaccustomed style, from even the enthralling topic of which he spoke.

'That is no matter, friend,' returned the other mournfully. 'When I was half your age, I had more book-learning than I have ever had since; I threw that away, lad, and much more than that—'

love, duty, reverence, and all things which become a man, before I left my teens. I wish for no retrospection now, except so much as may serve your present purpose. Are you for the Magdalena River, friend ?'

'Yes,' exclaimed Marsden, with excitement—'a thousand times yes: it is for that I have been pinching and screwing to save what you see here. It is for that I have borne with Drudgery and Wretchedness, and, and'——. The young man blushed and hesitated.

'And Solitude, or Base Companionship, as you would say,' continued the old man, 'were not I here to listen. Say on, Robert Marsden; it cannot have been otherwise. I have watched you night and day; I have seen the gold-fever heightening; I have had it myself, and know how it saps the young life within a man. What money have you in all?'

'I have more than three hundred pounds.'

'Good. With what the store will yield, and my own small savings, I have nearly twice as much as that. We will put the two sums together, and having gone to Melbourne, endeavour to hire a ship, if we cannot procure a passage otherwise to Santa Martha. I am ready; and since it is so settled, the sooner we are off, the better for you, for the longer time I shall be able to be of use to you.'

The old man's voice was mournful, and conveyed some rebuke in it, but Marsden heard nothing of that. A river was rushing in his ears over sands of gold, and the roar and the glitter were such that for nought else had he either sight or hearing. Old Simon had something like tears in his eyes for the

indifference of the lad whom he loved as his own son, but who, for his part, only loved himself.

'Let us go,' cried Marsden, 'by all means; I wish, with all my heart, that we had gone twelve months ago.'

When the two friends arrived at Melbourne, there was no vessel about to sail for the West Indies, nor did their united means suffice to hire one. Even a small schooner that plied between the port and the town, and brought goods up the river some seven miles at the same rate per ton as was charged for the entire voyage from England, was quite out of the reach of their purse. All too scant as it was, that dwindled daily too, in spite of their economical mode of life, and the Magdalena River seemed to be further off than even at Marycross. In this strait, Robert Marsden, in whose mind's eye the treasure was assuming ever greater proportions, and who could not apply his perturbed brain to any occupation in consequence, ventured on a hazardous experiment; he revealed the tremendous secret to a third person, one Hunter, a builder, with whom he had had some dealings, and managed to inoculate that individual with some of his own enthusiasm. This man was not of such a character as Marsden would have chosen to be confidential with, if he could have helped it, but there did not seem to be any alternative. Enough that he had money, and was willing to risk some of it; and the young man was well satisfied to find himself by any means fairly upon his watery way, although the guerdon of his journey

was of course diminished in value by the application of the Rule of Three. Old Simon's third share, however, Marsden reckoned with reason almost as his own, and £66,666, 13s. 4d., or thereabouts, was a very nice sort of nest-egg, still, to be picked up in river-sand; but he certainly needed some pleasant outlook in the future to compensate for the exceeding discomfort of his present circumstances.

The schooner which had to take them about half across the world was manned only by eight persons, besides the three copartners, and yet for these the sleeping accommodation was limited indeed. There was no such thing on board as a cabin passenger, with the exception of Old Simon, who was treated as tenderly by the two treasure-seekers as though he had been the wife of the governor of Australia taking a sea-trip for the benefit of her health. Marsden had to work as a common sailor, whenever the weather was anything but perfectly fair, and his only satisfaction was, that his new companion enjoyed it even less than himself. The very first day of their voyage, they took off the skin of their hands at rope-hauling; and it was a fortnight before they got their sea-legs sufficiently to enable them to venture on them from one end of the deck to the other, although it was such a very little way. The cabin where they slept, when they were allowed to sleep, and had not to keep watch, was about six feet by five; and there they also dined. The captain entitled this apartment 'snug,' but as he also denominated a sort of grating which was attached to the ship's side sometimes, and swung there frightfully, an 'accommoda-

tion ladder,' it was evident that his opinions were peculiar, and his requirements easily satisfied. As to sea-sickness being 'a thing one gets over after a day or two,' or to the motion of a sailing-vessel producing but comparatively little nausea (as some wiseacres assert) the two younger partners experienced the complete falsehood of such theories, and envied the placid stomach of their colleague of eighty years a thousand times; although indeed, Old Simon was far from well, through more serious causes. Even when society on board ship is very numerous and well assorted, and every convenience and luxury are supplied in lavish profusion, a long voyage can never be aught but a great evil. There is no face one can sit opposite to at dinner for six months without satiety, and no voice that does not pall upon the ear. Conceive, then, what must have been an existence of that duration to a young gentleman shut up in a small floating box with eight unsympathising sailors, a pirate—affectionate, indeed, but serious—and a knavish builder, who was always hugging a brandy bottle. This gentleman would often protest that Marsden had deceived him, both as to the length of the voyage and to its object, and sometimes in mid ocean, would entreat, with maudlin tears, to be put on shore. He had laden the ship heavily with timber, to the great reduction of the comfort of all on board, and insisted on its touching at one of the West India Islands to sell his cargo, instead of steering straight for Santa Martha: it may be supposed, therefore, that he was not a little chagrined to receive at St. Thomas's, in the way



of profit for freight over so many thousand miles, the very modest sum of fifteen dollars. This disappointment, the brandy, and the change of climate, worked together so much for evil in the builder, that he fairly quarrelled with Marsden, with whom, indeed, he had never been on particularly good terms, though at the same time redoubling his attentions to their venerable friend. Perhaps, too, the sense of the approaching division of the treasure, if treasure there should be, affected a disposition more than ordinarily covetous; or perhaps the air of superiority which Marsden did doubtless assume towards him—the moneyed man—could be no longer borne; at all events his dislike got to be now manifest and undisguised, and was repaid by the object of it with quite as open and thorough a contempt.

The disposal of the cargo at St. Thomas's, cheaply as it went, took not a little time; and while in harbour there, an addition was made to their company in the person of one Cobra, who was to be a passenger to Santa Martha. This gentleman, a dark and austere-looking Spaniard, had been picked up and fraternised with by Hunter, as being a brother Freemason, and he soon grew very intimate with him upon the still more fraternal ground of roguery. Marsden could scarcely refuse to take him on board, since there was no one in the schooner save old Simon—and he but imperfectly—who could speak Spanish; and Cobra, who knew English pretty well, expressed himself willing to interpret for them. Hunter and he were for ever closeted together, and

gave our hero not a little uneasiness. In particular, as he lay one morning smoking on the deck, he heard through the cabin-window scraps of a whispered conversation between those worthies, which convinced him that the great secret was no longer confined to three. He had, however, his consolation in the facts, that, in the first place, Hunter was a coward, and would not be likely to drive him to extremities; and secondly, and in case of the worst, that his own revolver was furnished with two barrels more than would be necessary. It would not be less easy, he flattered himself, to rob a tigress of her whelps than to deprive him of his rightful share in that great treasure, the thought of which had been the solace of so many hardships.

Old Simon had scarce moved out of the cabin throughout the voyage, except in very fine weather; but since they had arrived in the Spanish Main, he could scarcely be kept below, and never seemed to tire of looking upon the purple sea.

'Half a life-time ago,' Marsden heard him murmur, as they sat on deck together in the island harbour, 'and it seems only yesterday.' Then he added aloud: 'They hung him yonder behind the town, in the valley between Bluebeard's and Blackbeard's castles. The black flag had waved before then from both those ruins. Kydd lived in one, 'tis said; he who nailed his hatches down, and then lit brimstone to see which of all his reprobates would longest bear the mimic hell. I myself have seen strange sights in this blue water, lad. This beautiful spot was even then a nest of evil-doers.'

'There are some precious bad ones here still,' observed Marsden in a whisper, and pointing with his finger to the cabin where the two inseparables were sitting over their brandy; 'it is not only you and I, Simon, and one more, who know about the roots of the Tamarind tree.'

'Has he told the Spaniard?' inquired the old man earnestly. 'It is only what I expected of the lying villain. By the bye, lad,' added he, after a little pause, 'put this sealed paper into your pocket; it is my will, written in your favour, but only to be opened after my death. It is not good luck to give one's will away, but it is sometimes safer.' The old man shivered as he spoke.

'You don't feel ill, I hope,' asked Marsden with genuine feeling, for he was touched with the kindness of the old man's manner, although he attached but little value to his bequest.

'Yes, lad, I do feel very ill indeed, and have this long time: I well know it is the sickness unto death, and do not regret it. I much desired to look upon these scenes again, and would fain not have died in those far latitudes; but now I care not when the time comes for me to feed the sharks.'

'The sharks!' cried Marsden; 'pray, do not talk like that. We sail to-morrow, and shall be on the mainland within a week. There you will recover health, I hope, and do away with the effects of this most wearisome and hateful voyage.'

'Perhaps,' said the old man, smiling faintly—'perhaps it may be so. No, thank you, lad, I do not need an arm;' and so saying, the old graybeard

tottered off below, with a very different gait from that he had used at Maycross, and was received by Mr. Hunter and his friend in the cabin with their customary enthusiasm.

The next day, as they sped before a favourable breeze to Santa Martha, Simon was worse; and in the evening, it was clear to all who saw him that his old eyes would never open to see land again. Marsden could not eject Hunter from the cabin, who had, as it were, a vested interest in the dying man; but he insisted upon Cobra's absence, who accordingly coiled himself on deck, after the fashion of his reptile namesake, to play the eaves-dropper as near to the open cabin skylight as he dared. Marsden did what little he could for the sufferer, in making cooling drinks for his parched lips, and applying vinegar rags to his burning forehead; but Hunter had exhausted all *his* remedies in offering the patient a bottle of excellent brandy, and contented himself with 'watching the case,' and pouring the rejected liquor down his own throat.

'Don't you think,' whispered he to Marsden, after a long silence, only broken by the gasps and catchings for breath of the now rapidly sinking old man; 'don't you think it would be well to ask him—if it would be no great inconvenience—to go over again very carefully the description of the exact spot where the treasure is? You pass two creeks,' continued he, referring to his note-book, 'on the right bank of the river; the first, four miles from its mouth; the second, two miles further; and two miles beyond that, on the same side, is the creek

without losing much time at the governor's residence. The ground was trodden around for several paces, and the young man almost fancied he could recognise Hunter's very foot-marks. How he must have stamped with passion, to find he had been brought such a very considerable distance upon a mere fool's errand. Marsden laid himself down on the spot where the tree had stopd, and looked steadily across to the opposite bank, where quite a forest of mangroves fringed the stream. He never took his eyes off an object he then selected, but re-embarking, steered the canoe directly upon it. Having landed, he sat himself down between the mangrove trees, a little away from the river, and similarly scrutinised the position of the spot which he had lately quitted. Then he took out old Simon's will from his pocket, and perused it for about the hundredth time.

'I perceived, dear lad,' it ran, 'very soon after our first acquaintance, that you were not quite the man to be intrusted with the whole of a secret so important as is here written; for it would not, I saw, remain in the possession of us two alone. Forgive my distrust, if you do not acknowledge my judgment, for I should be sorry that any feeling should be harboured in your breast respecting me save that of regard. In my conduct to you, I have nothing to reproach myself with—in truth, nothing. You cannot, I thank Heaven, understand what a source of comfort this is to one who has been the enemy of so many of his fellow-men. There is at least one person in the world whom I have done my

best to benefit. But your mind is fixed upon your treasure, and that alone. Why, you are saying, does the old man maunder after this fashion? As I myself once was, you are impatient of all that does not immediately concern yourself. God forbid that the like harvest may be garnered by you which has been by me. The Thing you seek is not, as I have heretofore told you, on the right bank, but on the *left*, and exactly *opposite* to the tree I have mentioned. It is buried half way between two mangoes upon the river-brink.'

Between the two mangoes, therefore, Marsden directed the astonished natives to dig with their long sweeps; but although they laboured long and hard with these unwieldy instruments, there was nothing brought to light. From the old man's account, it was evident that only a slight layer of sand had been cast over the buried treasure, therefore it was clear that they had not hit upon the precise spot of interment. Marsden did not, it must be confessed, harbour one doubt of Simon's veracity in his own mind, but yet the big drops of agonising disappointment stood out upon his forehead. Again he examined the river-bank, and a little below its rim, and beneath the water, he perceived two rotten stumps, which might perhaps, at no distant time, have been mangoe trees. The stream had most certainly risen, and its bed been widened there. The natives drove away a torpid alligator that lay close by, and ventured in as far as their knees; then they recommenced their digging between the stumps, and at the second stroke laid

bare the surface of some solid substance ; it might have been a turtle's egg, or an alligator's back, or a stone—so Marsden schooled himself to imagine—but it turned out to be a huge and heavy cedar box, bound with slimy and rotting hide ; the lid of this had been apparently, at one time, forced open ; and there was a dull yellow glitter from the inside of it, until Marsden choked up its gaping tell-tale mouth with sand. There were also seven other boxes of similar size and weight. It was lucky that Mr. Robert Marsden had inquired for those goods, which had so long been left till called for, when he did, as in a few more months, at most, the sand would have been swept quite off them by the swift flowing Magdalena, and they would probably have attracted attention, and been of value to other people beside the owner.

## CHAPTER XXI.

## FATHER AND DAUGHTER.

UNLESS one is a lady and his lover, one does not generally speaking, rush into the arms of a dear friend whom we have not seen for three or four years, as we might do if we had been only apart from him for the same number of weeks. Though we have written to him ever so often—and men do not correspond regularly with men, unless in the way of business—we find it impossible throughout so protracted a period to keep our affection for him as fresh as at parting. He has had experiences of joy and of sorrow, wholly different from ours in the meantime, and we suspect with reason that they must have more or less moulded his character. He is not, in short, the same man. It is impossible, we find, to take up the familiarity dropped so long ago, and to resume it at the same point, as though there had been no interval. Sir Charles Ryder, Baronet, Magistrate of the County, Custos Rotulorum, and what not, could not be expected to meet Robert Marsden, late carpenter and builder, and finder of piratical treasure, as Ryder had been wont to meet Marsden after a six weeks' absence from Teesdale How. And yet he welcomed the black-bearded, sunburnt man to Rudesleigh with hearty earnestness, and bade him make his home there, among old



friends as long as he liked. 'There is one in particular, in that chamber,' he added smiling, and pointing to the boudoir window as they stood on the hall-steps, 'by whom your welcome should be first given.' By which speech (which was not extemporaneous by any means) he put an end at once to what might otherwise have been a subject of unpleasant reserve between them.

Marsden had arrived so early, that it was not yet breakfast-time, and he had half an hour's undisturbed conversation with Ellen before that meal, at which he sat down with her for the first time as her accepted lover; a fact which Mr. Onslow Bateman acceded to with his accustomed serenity. Perhaps it was that in that delicious interview the dear girl had put the exile in possession of all the more important facts which had taken place during his absence—although our own opinion is that she never said a word about them; or perhaps he was only actuated by the not uncommon perversity which prompts long absent persons to talk of the things that happened to them quite recently—of the new line of railway they yesterday travelled by (well known to all their auditors for years), and of the man on the gray horse who took off his hat to them just before they drove in at the lodge-gates—rather than of what is new, and strange, and interesting to their friends; but, at all events, Marsden's topic of conversation was not his own antipodal experiences, but the excellence of the *Vampire* newspaper. He had bought a copy as he got into the night express, and 'was indebted to it for having put an end to the

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somewhat melancholy feelings which visiting the dear old places in Cumberland had engendered.'

'In Cumberland! Why, how came you there?' inquired Florence with astonishment.

'Really, my dear Miss Florence, I do not think you need to wonder that, since the opportunity was offered, I should spend one day among the places with which, hitherto at least'—here he bowed to the younger sister—'the pleasantest period of my life has been associated.'

'Hear, hear,' observed Mr. Onslow Bateman approvingly. 'It is certain that Marsden has been a member of the Australian senate.'

'I think you might have come here first, nevertheless,' said Ellen Bateman, with the prettiest possible pout of her red lips: 'you ought to have been thinking of nothing else but coming here.'

'That was just the case,' responded Marsden gallantly; 'I actually *could* think of nothing else; and the way seemed long indeed this morning until I bought the *Vampire*. It seems a very remarkable print.'

'Seems, my dear sir; it *is*,' observed Mr. Hardy Wentworth, in the accents of Mr. Kean.

'It must at least have some extremely clever contributors,' continued Marsden, feeling in the pockets of his shooting-coat for the paper in question.

'I am glad to see your critical acumen has not been impaired by life in the bush, my dear friend,' remarked Mr. Bateman gravely: 'you have no such newspapers in that part of the world, I reckon.'

'No, indeed; nothing of the sort,' assented Mars-

den. 'Of course, we have plenty of scurrility, but none of this elegant malice, this educated Billingsgate.'

Ryder put down his knife and fork, and laughed until the tears came into his eyes. 'We take in a couple of copies, my dear fellow, here : there are two duplicates of what you hold in your hand in that very post-bag yonder. Some of us at Rudesleigh have a very great admiration for that journal, I assure you.'

'And no wonder,' observed Marsden, still quite unconscious of the existence of a personal interest in any of his auditory concerning the subject under discussion. 'Why, just read this review, for instance, upon the last "success" in literature, a novel called *Anne Chisholm*.'

'Bless my soul and body,' ejaculated little Miss Ryder, and that so vehemently that all eyes were at once turned towards that lady, who was, however, luckily, a good deal obscured by the urn. 'I really beg your pardon, Mr. What's-your-name, but I upset the milk, and it gave me quite a turn.'

'I hope that that will not be reciprocal, madam,' observed Mr. Onslow Bateman with a bow ; for he always bowed when he made a *jeu d'esprit*, in order that the world should not be a loser through its inattention.

'Well,' continued Marsden, 'this unfortunate book is handled worse than Izaak Walton treated worms. It is written by a woman, it seems, and that gives opportunity for a pretence of delicacy on the part of the critic, which, considering that he is in reality as coarse as he can be, is exceedingly humorous. He

remarks that ladies' maids and governesses can hardly ever be judges of good society.'

'There is a felicitous suggestiveness about that I like amazingly,' observed Hardy Wentworth.

'Say rather a delicate blackguardism,' exclaimed Ryder indignantly. 'Pray, go on, and get it over. I had just as soon hear a detailed account of a case of wife-beating.'

'Oh, there is far too much of it to read,' replied Marsden; 'it's a shower of poisoned darts that lasts for ever so long, and some of which I should think the poor authoress would never get quite quit of. Indeed, it is sometimes altogether too bad. If, he concludes, it had not been understood that it was a woman and a young one who had written the volume, he would draw attention to certain portions of its contents, the purity of which is more than questionable. Now, he either ought to have quoted those, or said nothing about them. That is a sort of inuendo which would kill some female Keatses, I suppose.'

'And as good a deed as drink if it did,' remarked Harry Wentworth sullenly; 'we want no more young authors, and far less authoresses, now-a-days.'

'You did not write the review yourself, Wentworth?' inquired Ryder gravely. 'Good: I am truly glad to hear it; and I may be therefore allowed to say that, having read the book in question myself with extreme interest and attention, that no such passages as are referred to exist therein at all; and that the inuendo conveyed in the notice is not only malicious and cruel, but a gratuitous lie.'

‘I don’t think it is likely to have been gratuitous,’ remarked Mr. Onslow Bateman, as the ladies left the table, turning, with his usual dexterity, what threatened to become an acrimonious discussion into an agreeable pleasantry. ‘The fact is, my dear Marsden, Mr. Wentworth and myself are connected with the paper that has had the good fortune to please you. We are part proprietors of the *Vampire*.’

‘I need not ask, then, whether it is a paying concern, I hope?’

‘Well, the fact is, it is and it isn’t,’ replied Mr. Hardy Wentworth, with an excellent imitation of manly frankness. ‘It is spoken highly of, quoted largely, and certainly commands some talent; but we are in want of a little capital—we had, in fact, not enough money to start with—and need some extra supervision at head-quarters. Verjuice has so many personal enemies that the paper makes no way where it is most important that it should do so. Now, if we could persuade Mr. Onslow Bateman here to go up to town himself for a little, the *Vampire* would soon, I believe, become the *Phoenix*.’

‘How much money would be requisite to set it flying again?’ inquired Marsden, with some interest.

Ryder passed close by the last speaker, on his way out of the room, and as he passed, he whispered to him to take an old friend’s advice, and keep his nuggets in his pocket. Marsden nodded, with the air of a man who has made his own money, and thoroughly understands the nature of every sort of commercial transaction, and then reiterated his question.

‘How much money? Well, really,’ said Went-

worth, 'Cracker is general manager, and knows everything to a fraction. A thousand or two would, I suppose, keep us going for ever so long.' Would it not, Bateman ?'

'My dear sir,' responded that gentleman quietly, 'that entirely depends upon the sense you happen to attach to the expression "ever so long." My last five hundred pounds sufficed it for a fortnight; a couple of thousands would therefore extend over a couple of months.'

The lugubrious accents of Mr. Onslow Bateman were not intended to produce melancholy in his auditor by any means, nor to depreciate the value of the *Vampire* as a literary property; nor did they have any such effect. It is not customary, it is true, for the sharers in any commercial venture to cry stinking fish, or to rate its value low to intending purchasers; but such a line has been taken once or twice with very considerable success. In that case, the judicious seller has nothing to reproach himself with, though the worst should come to the worst, and the buyer may at least congratulate himself that his credulity was never imposed upon. Marsden had a high opinion of the ex-tutor's keenness and judgment, was not averse to speculation, and more than all, had taken a violent fancy to the *Vampire*, which suited his purposeless nature very well. He found out, too, now that he had no occasion to work for his living, that he was not a little ambitious. 'If one gave substantial help,' said he, 'one would have a hand in the management, I suppose: the right of inserting a leader or two occasionally?'

‘Well,’ replied Mr. Wentworth, ‘I really cannot say; we must ask Verjuice, you see’——

‘We will not ask Verjuice at all,’ interrupted Mr. Onslow Bateman hastily, and observing his old pupil’s brow to darken; ‘we don’t want any “friend in the city” in such a matter as this. Yes, Marsden, you shall insert what you please, I promise you.’

‘I’ll think of it,’ replied the young man, consulting his watch, and finding the time had arrived for a walk with his beloved object.

Mr. Onslow Bateman accompanied the young couple to the hall-steps, not for the sake of blessing them, after the manner of a stage-parent, but because he wished to shake off Wentworth, and smoke his cigar in the bowling-green alone. Whenever this agreeable middle-aged gentleman was unwell or in bad spirits, he preferred to have his own company only to inflict himself upon, and we wish many much better men of our acquaintance had a similar habit. This bowling-green was the most charming summer retreat that any philosopher could imagine, and it is one of the signs perhaps of our becoming less of philosophers that our bowling-greens are growing fewer and fewer. We do not speak of those miserable oblong fragments of torn turf which usurp that noble title upon sign-boards, and which, in the base companionship of a dry skittle-alley, allure persons behind public-houses who have scrupled about getting drunk within doors; but those silent shaded spots which were once attached to half the country-houses of England, and devoted to Bias the sage. The Rudesleigh bowling-green was as smooth as its

billiard-table, with grassy banks sloping up from its tiny fosses for spectators to recline upon, except on the south side, where there was a small but many-tinted flower-garden, and a little fountain which had once sustained a ball. This ball, however, had been removed at the request of the ex-tutor, who had complained that it affected him uncomfortably, as a conjuror does of whose continued success in ball-catching we have our doubts, and whose risk of failure makes us nervous—so sensitive was Mr. Onslow Bateman's nature, even with respect to matters inanimate. It is possible, nevertheless, that upon this particular morning he could have borne even *that* anxiety, had the cause for it existed, for his mind was evidently engaged on other and probably more serious subjects. He paced slowly up and down the little gravel terrace above the green, and under the great twelve-foot wall of yew that sheltered on all sides the bowling-green and garden from the winds, with his hands behind him, and his brow heavy with care. So immersed was he in thought that he did not hear the light step of his daughter Florence close behind him, nor even the first gentle 'Papa, dear,' that she uttered. Her voice was always low and musical; but when she spoke to her father, it had a certain winning tenderness, which it was strange so delicate an ear as his had hitherto failed to notice.

'Papa, dear, you are sad, I fear,' said she, addressing him for the second time, and looking up at him with a wistful air in her large eyes. He stopped, and since it would have inconvenienced him to unclasp



his hands, permitted her to salute his cheek ; though, as a general rule, Mr. Onslow Bateman did not much encourage demonstrative filial regard.

‘ If it isn’t interrupting you, I want to have a little talk with you, papa.’

‘ Really, Florence,’ observed Mr. Bateman, drawing out his gold repeater, ‘ I have rather particular business very shortly.’ He dignified luncheon by that title, because he was alarmed at her unusually serious tone, portending something unpleasant (a thing which he always hated to hear); and therefore, like a skilful general, he opened for himself a line of retreat at once, should retreat be advisable.

‘ I will only detain you a very few minutes, papa. Please—please do tell me what it is makes you sad ? ’ Her whole face, nay, her very figure, leaning upon him in the attitude of a suppliant, pleaded for her ; her heart, if he could have looked into it, pleaded too for love and confidence, but he answered coldly enough : ‘ Tut, tut, Florence ; is that all you want to say ? I have no sad, nor even serious thoughts. I hope, as Mrs. Quickly said, it isn’t time to think of such things yet. I wanted a game of bowls, and could get nobody to play with me, that was all. Now, I’ve got somebody, and am in spirits again. Come now, see ; I will play with my feet, and you shall play with your hands, and yet I’ll beat you.’ He drew her down on to the green, and laughingly began to knock the balls about.

‘ Dear papa, I would so much rather you would talk to me a little.’ Mr. Onslow Bateman dropped his daughter’s arm with an offended air. ‘ Do not

be angry, please, with me ; but I do love you so, if you would let me show it. Will you sit with me on the bench there for five minutes ? ’

‘For five minutes I will, Florence,’ responded her father stiffly ; ‘but it is that description of garden-seat which I detest, with its back all knobs and points.’

Since there was so little time to be lost, Florence could not but be abrupt in her questions. ‘Do you want any money, dear papa ? ’

Never in all his not uneventful life had Mr. Onslow Bateman had so very plain and uncompromising an inquiry addressed to him. Even to his agile mind no means of evasion presented themselves upon the instant, and he answered ‘Yes,’ as directly and straightforwardly as any vulgar person might have done.

‘Would five hundred pounds be of any substantial service to you ? ’

This happened to be precisely the sum that Mr. Bateman had borrowed of the young baronet, and which had since been sucked up by the *Vampire* ; it was the loss of that money which at that moment, indeed, was so affecting him, not because of his inability to repay it, so much as that it absolutely left him without the means of proceeding to London, and there, as Wentworth had suggested, looking after the interests of the paper himself. He was so struck by his daughter’s earnest manner, and so impressed by it with the conviction that she had really some practical help to offer, that he openly stated his present necessity and the reason of it.

'Then, my dear papa,' said she, producing a little parcel, and kissing him very tenderly, 'here is that sum, which I am glad indeed to be able to put at your disposal.'

'And who gave you that, my dear?' inquired Mr. Onslow Bateman in astonishment.

'Nobody, dear papa. I earned it myself, unknown to every one except good kind Miss Ryder. I had rather have had you for a confidant, dear papa. But I never can work so again—never, never, again—although I wish for your sake that I could.' Large tears filled the poor girl's eyes, and coursed down the delicate cheeks, whose extreme paleness Mr. Onslow Bateman now for the first time observed; dark rims had those eyes, too, now he saw, and the beautiful face was looking altogether thin and haggard.

'What is it, my child?' said her father pitifully, touched in what was really a most tender heart, although there was in general far too little room in it for any sorrows save his own. 'I am quite in the dark about this work of yours, and the trouble which has come of it. I ought not to have been so, I feel'—

'Never mind, dear papa—never mind,' interrupted hastily the sobbing girl. 'I was sure you would feel for me when you did know. If it had not been that I saw you so grieved and anxious lately, and thought this money might be of some service, I would not have troubled you with my concerns at all.'

'What! not your own father?' said Mr. Onslow

Bateman, stroking her cheek, and speaking in a tone of playful reproach; 'would you not even have told *him* ?'

'About the work, papa, yes; but not about the pain that has come of it. That was only this morning, though. What dreadful, dreadful things that newspaper did say !'

'Whatever the work has been, my love,' said he, with his old laughing manner, 'it must, I fear, have a little affected your brain. I know of no dreadful newspaper. What *do* you mean ?'—('She never could have sold five hundred pounds' worth of crochet surely,' thought Mr. Bateman to himself, 'although it is surprising for what a time these women can go on at that.')

'The *Vampire*, papa, I mean. Did you not hear them talking of that horrid review in it at breakfast ?'

'Yes, my dear, but——Goodness gracious, what a state you young people are put into by the misfortunes of others ! I remember I used to be just as tender-hearted myself when I was young. That review will hurt nobody, you may take my word for it. If I had achieved such a success as the authoress of *Anne Chisholm*, I would have let the universal press of the United Kingdom salute me with their execrations, and welcome. It is a work of true genius, and no newspaper critic can either mend or mar such a thing as that.'

'O papa, but if you were a poor girl who had set her hope upon the result of that one venture; not for the sake of fame only——though that is something

to the heart of the young—but of honest independence, and the independence of others. Consider, I say, that poor girl's agony when she reads in a paper that is highly thought of and largely read, not ridicule of her humble attempt to gain a name for herself—for that may have been justified by her incapacity—not the fair open attack that every one who has the courage to publish should have the courage to face ; but covert insults—suggestions too horrible to repeat, of what she had hinted here and intended there, when she had meant nothing, as God knows, from beginning to end, but what was pure, and honest, and maidenly.'

Mr. Onslow Bateman's face had grown very pale during this pitiful appeal, and his voice belied his words as he tried to utter gaily: 'You are making yourself unnecessarily anxious about this supposed young woman, Florence ; she is doubtless on the wrong side of forty, and wears spectacles of neutral tint, my dear : and I have no doubt that she is writing another story at this moment, even better than the first.'

'Never, never,' exclaimed Florence bitterly ; 'she will never expose herself to such a pen again. The dream of my life is over ; for I have been awakened from it by far too cruel a hand. You said you liked *Anne Chisholm*, papa, and that word of yours, and this money—since it is of use to you—are the only pleasant associations I shall ever have with my first and last novel.'

'Did you write *Anne Chisholm*, daughter Florence?' asked he in a quavering voice. The same shadow of

intense pain fitted momentarily over Mr. Onslow Bateman's face which Ryder had observed there a few weeks before, and he murmured hoarsely: 'God forgive me, then, for it was your father who wrote that review!'

## CHAPTER XXII.

## AN EMBARRASSMENT OF SUITORS.

DIFFICULT as it is for the young aspirant after literary fame to get his torch lit at the sacred fire, when that is once accomplished, it is far more difficult to hide his candle under a bushel—to 'keep it dark' at all. Her secret being once out of the sole keeping of trusty Miss Ryder, Florence Bateman soon became identified with the authoress of *Anne Chisholm*, and produced the usual sensation among her friends. Some of them 'could never have believed it of her,' and 'never were so astonished in their lives;' but the great majority, with more of compliment, if less of truth, affirmed that 'they had guessed it all along,' and, indeed, had each confided it, months ago—even in some cases before the work in question was published—but in the strictest confidence, to their dear friend, Mrs. Harris. Miss Ryder recompensed herself for her long and unwilling reticence by following Florence whithersoever she moved, with admiring eyes, and directing, by nods and winks of intense significance, the attention of visitors to her talented *protégée*, as though the young lady had been a Unicorn, and she its blessed proprietor. Ellen Bateman, who had laughed, a little scornfully perhaps, at her sister's devotion to literature, was not in the slightest degree

envious at its results, but expressed her delight at it in an abundance of half-triumphant, half-penitential tears. She deemed her to be the greatest genius of either sex that this country had hitherto produced, reserving to herself, however, the conviction that had dearest Robert chosen to exert herself with pen and ink, there would have been a single exception. Mr. Onslow Bateman—and this was the reward which Florence valued highest—became from being rather a philosophic parent, one who seemed never sufficiently able to express his fatherly pride in her, although, notwithstanding his affectionate encouragement, she could not be persuaded to write another line; while Mr. Hardy Wentworth—and this was her greatest triumph, perhaps, although she did not estimate it very highly—excepted for the future, in all his sweeping condemnations of the female sex (for whom he had a full measure of that contempt he entertained for everything) the modest and unobtrusive authoress of *Anne Chisholm*. The effects more or less produced by this discovery upon Robert Marsden and Charles Ryder were of such importance as to merit more particular description. The young baronet, since he perceived that the whole subject was distressing to her, had confined himself hitherto to a few words of congratulation, and was the least jubilant, to all appearance, over the young lady's success, of all. When preparation, however, began to be made for the departure of the ex-tutor for London, and the pleasant Rudesleigh household was at length upon the point of being broken up, Ryder solicited an



interview with Florence Bateman, somewhat as the Earl of Essex, when most dutifully disposed, might have begged one of Queen Elizabeth. That nobleman would have carried on the subsequent conversation, however, we fancy, with a good deal more of ease and fluency, not to say passionate warmth, than did this bashful young gentleman. This *tête-à-tête* meeting was held in the Bowling-green, as being a sequestered spot for such a purpose, and Sir Charles Ryder very nearly poisoned himself by the number of yew-berries which he plucked off the hedge and devoured in his nervousness.

‘I am a stuttering, stammering donkey,’ he began, suiting the action to the words, and blushing like a very magnificent crown-imperial; ‘and it is possible, my dear Miss Florence, that had it not been for your approaching departure from Rudesleigh, I might never have broken silence at all. You are so much better and wiser than I, and now you are famous too, so that it seems more difficult for me than ever to address you. Indeed,’ added the young man, stopping suddenly, ‘I cannot now say, and never can, and never shall be able to say the words that I would wish at the right time.’

‘My dear Sir Charles,’ replied Florence with deep feeling, ‘that is not quite true. I have not forgotten—I never shall forget—that on the unhappy morning when this wretched book of mine, which I wish from the bottom of my heart had never been written, was so cruelly spoken of in that paper, you, and you alone, stigmatised the harshness and untruth of what was said of it with the eloquence that is born

only of a kind heart and an honest mind. That you liked my book, was, and is a thing very cheering to me, but that you spoke as you did, of your own knowledge of the falsehood of the charge brought against it, was a comfort unspeakable, a deed in words I cannot say how gratifying to me.'

'Could my opinion really give you pleasure, Florence?'

The extreme simplicity and modesty with which the young man spoke, would at any other time have provoked his companion to laughter; as it was, she merely took that opportunity of disabusing him of an error which, being by no means confined to himself, may be worth recording.

'I think, Sir Charles, that we poor people who write, or who have written, are liable to a very unjust misrepresentation. We are assumed by many persons to have parted with the best feelings of our nature in exchange for some very questionable ones indeed. I did not—I do not, even now that it is mine no longer—underrate the profession of literature, nor affect to despise its honours and advantages. There are a large number of persons who fall into that mistake, I am aware; but I do not share it with them. If I were a writer, I should magnify my office, rather than pretend to despise it, as is the fashion with even some writers themselves. But do not—pray, do not imagine that any breath of public applause, any large-typed eulogium in newspapers, any elevation upon temporary and insecure pedestals of notoriety whatever, can weigh with the approval of the kind hearts at home.

Those are lasting, and are always with us if we know how to keep them. The others are evanescent indeed, and often forsake us without any fault on our own part. The good opinion of any sensible man with a sound heart, is a greater private satisfaction to me than that of any anonymous critic whatsoever; but when that man is my friend, my benefactor, may I not almost be allowed to say my brother, dear Sir Charles'—

'No; pray, don't say your brother,' replied Ryder earnestly, 'for that is what I want to speak to you about. You have given me courage to tell you something, if you will only please to listen.' He took her by the hand, which, trembling a little in his, made his speech the more confident, and led her to the same seat which Mr. Onslow Bateman had pronounced to be so exceedingly uncomfortable. The young man, however, did not feel, or, at least, did not complain of, its knobs and points one bit. 'When I was a lad, Florence, I loved, or thought I loved, your sister, as you know. I would do anything to serve her now, to shield her from misfortune, and to aid her with all my power, if she met with it; but I have not loved her, save as a brother, since she came to Rudesleigh. There is an additional reason for my loving her as a brother, Florence, since she is your sister, and beloved of you. Do not withdraw your hand, dear girl, or at least not yet. It is the last time that I shall ever speak to you thus, if you so will it: do not unnecessarily soon awake me from this dream of happiness. I have suffered, Florence, now for years for-  
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mistake of my youth. I have atoned for it by a silence which, I sometimes thought, would have eaten away my heart. There is a void there as it is, Florence, which you alone can fill. I thought of your pride, too, for you are to the full as proud as your father, although in a different way. I saw you resented that I should be of use to him, that it was my greatest happiness to have you all about me in my home. You contrasted with harsh pride, I say—nay, do not attempt to deceive one who has watched you with the eyes of love for years—your own circumstances, and those of your family, with mine, whom accident had elevated to unexpected wealth. You thought yourself—and if you were one who could think basely, I should call it a base thought—a dependant, whereas it was *I* who was living on your every look. One mistake of yours has been rectified past dispute. You thought yourself obscure, and, behold, you have reached a height of fame of which no Ryder of Rudesleigh has ever even dreamed. It is that fame, which would deter another, that, having made you my superior, gives me boldness to say I love you. Florence, dear, darling Florence, can you love *me* ?'

The two young people seemed to have exchanged their relative powers of speech ; for long after Ryder's eloquent appeal was finished, the girl remained perfectly silent—which was the more reprehensible of her, as the audacious youth was actually consuming the interval in kissing her nearest cheek—and when she did speak, had not very much to say. Her brief reply was to the

point, however, and seemed to afford every satisfaction. 'I have always, always loved you, dearest Charles, although there was a time when I did my best to stifle it.'

'For Ellen's sake?' exclaimed the young man penitently, in spite of his rapture. 'What a fool I was! and you—you are nothing less than an angel!'

After this interview, these two young persons frequented that same solitary bowling-green with a curious pertinacity, each finding the other every morning there, as if by accident, and having found, politely remaining there to keep one another company. Sometimes Sir Charles came first, and sometimes Miss Florence—in the order that each could conveniently withdraw from his or her companions—and on the fourth morning it chanced to be the lady who is admiring the rainbow of flowers in the parterre, and the silvery flash of the fountain, as though she had never had the good fortune to behold them there before. A footfall on the gravel meets those ears, so attentive to every movement of love: she blushes, so that the rose, over which she leans and herself become one in colour; she expects to hear her own name, that never sounds half so sweetly as when murmured by the beloved voice. A hand is laid softly upon her shoulder; she turns round with her eyes brimming with tenderness and affection, and beholds—Mr. Robert Marsden.

He is an undeniably handsome young man still—almost as handsome as we knew him at Teesdale

How, although his order of beauty is not that which increases with years—but if he had been the sun-god himself, his presence just then would have been nought but an unmixed evil to Florence Bateman. Why had he not taken his decidedly wicked eyes, and too insinuating silken beard, elsewhere, where they would have been appreciated? She did not dare look her thoughts, however, for she was conscious of the disappointment which his unexpected appearance had already called up into her features, and feared the interpretation he might have put upon it. Marsden was not to her now what he had been, when a ‘pup’ in her father’s house; she rather dreaded the fierce will that held its own alike against the delicate sapping of Mr. Onslow Bateman, and the contemptuous front of Mr. Hardy Wentworth. ‘Why don’t you look at me, Florence?’ said he, in a low and melancholy tone. ‘Am I hideous, or am I hateful to you?’

‘You are neither, Mr. Marsden,’ replied she, a little indignant at his ‘Florencing’ her, although he was to be her brother-in-law; ‘but I was surprised at your sudden appearance here.’

‘So it seemed,’ replied the young man quietly; ‘I almost thought you were expecting somebody else.’

We put it upon record with a blush that our pattern young woman here replied, with all the ingenuous air of an honest witness upon his oath in a court of justice, ‘Papa comes here to smoke his cigar occasionally, and then he likes a companion.’

‘He will not, however, do so this morning,’ answered Marsden, ‘for he has taken Ryder with

him into the library to make choice of some books that he wishes to have the loan of while in London. Their employment gave me the greater hope of finding you alone, Florence, for I have something very important to say to you.'

'To *me*?' exclaimed Florence, with an air of great astonishment, but not without an additional throb or so of the heart-strings too.

'Yes, to you; to you, who above all women should understand human nature and its inconsistencies, since you have yourself painted them so admirably. You will know how to be charitable to its weaknesses, you will know how to appreciate its strength.'

'I am quite at a loss to know what you mean, Mr. Marsden; I only trust that unhappy book of mine may not have placed me in a false position with regard to you, as it seems to have done with respect to everybody else. It appears to me that you are overrating my abilities sadly'—

'Florence,' interrupted the young man with a voice almost stern in its unusual gravity, 'is it possible that *you* deny that the heart can change. Do *you* disbelieve that aught is true love which is not first love?'

The girl's colour came and went under his steadfast eye like April shadows, and she could not trust herself to speak to one who, as she deemed, had guessed her secret.

'You do not deny it, then,' continued he; 'perhaps you yourself have experienced such a change.'

'No, Mr. Marsden, I have not,' replied she

steadily; 'but I have seen it in another. I acknowledge that the affections of youth may sometimes, and perhaps not rarely, be misplaced; that in spite of itself the leal true heart can no longer make its home where it first rested, and happy for it, if without hurt to any, it may change its dwelling.'

'Happy for it, happy for it indeed,' echoed Robert Marsden. 'Florence, dear Florence, dearer to me than any woman born, listen to me. *Here* is the leal true heart. Here is the hand that would rather wed with you than with a princess: nay, you shall *be* a princess, being mine; for all my wealth is yours, and it is great, and you shall rule me, Florence, like a slave. Don't speak, but listen. You would say: "My sister, what of her?" I tell you that I know her well, a loving, trusting child, but one whose heart will never break for such a wretch as this. She'll weep a grief away in a fortnight—in three weeks at most. That's not the bride for me. Now, *you*—I read it now in your proud flush and angry eyes—would never bear to be so thwarted. You'd poison us both first; and so would I, by Heaven! I do not mean to rant; but while I look on you, dear Florence—glorious, brilliant-eyed Perfection that you are—I am not master of myself; I want some noble soul like yours to master me. I feel that on this sea of life, without some steady hand like yours to guide me, I shall wreck.'

'You are acting out of a stage-play, Mr. Marsden,' replied Florence coldly, 'and you are acting exceedingly ill. If all you said were true—nay, let *me* speak



now—I should be sorry for your sake, more sorry for my sister's, but it would not move me one hair's breadth towards loving you. The very mention of that word 'twixt me and you—the possibility of such an union thus suggested—is vile and hateful to me. I do not love you as a brother, Robert Marsden, for I do not love you at all; but I will try to look upon you with some regard for another's sake—not yours—and hope in time to forget this madness you have just now uttered. You will forget it yourself right soon, as I well know. If I thought that my recital of your words would open my dear sister's eyes, and save her from this marriage with you even now, I fairly tell you I would speak it all. But she is so fond, so loving, so credulously trustful of you—O heartless ingrate, if you treat her ill, may God's curse light on you!—that I dare not do it, I confess it, I dare not. O Robert Marsden, so much do I love that sister, and so little hold my own self-respect in comparison with her lasting happiness, that if in anything you have just now been saying there is a gleam of truth, if you really have a kindness towards me separate from mere delusive passion and wayward wilfulness, I ask thus much, O spare my Ellen for the sake of me. Leave her: do not make her your wife, for I foresee a misery that will come of it far greater than any present grief at losing you.'

'And I?' observed Marsden quietly, but by no means unmoved by this outbreak of sisterly affection. 'What think you will become of me? Or am I not worth a thought?'

'You are worth much, Marsden. You might do both great and good things if you would. The nature that can inspire so many with admiration and regard cannot be wholly evil. That is why I shall now leave you, if not with great good will, without that contempt and loathing with which your conduct would otherwise have inspired me. Will you please to shake hands?'

He was about to take the proffered fingers, but she suddenly withdrew them from his grasp. 'Robert Marsden, you are not yet cured, I see. Shall I say, then, that I hate you?'

'I swear I love you better, more, than ever,' exclaimed the young man fervently. 'Is there no hope, none whatever, Florence?'

'Certainly none, sir,' replied Florence Bateman scornfully. 'Your friend, Charles Ryder, who is coming up the green yonder, is my affianced husband.'

## CHAPTER XXIII.

## THE VAMPIRE COLLAPSES.

BEFORE Mr. Onslow Bateman finally left Rudesleigh for London, the double marriage took place at the manor house. It was with a heavy heart that the otherwise happy Florence saw her sister given to wayward Robert Marsden until death should them part; but Ellen did not share her misgivings. If a hundred little loving acts of hers escaped her lover's notice daily, she was content to set it down to anything but coldness or inattention. Faults she did not believe that he possessed, and his weaknesses she could make allowances for, and pardon. That he loved—or had loved within a month or so—another woman, was, of course, unknown to her; and if such a fact is indeed an insuperable bar to the future happiness of a couple, there ought to be more people applying for divorces even than there are.

There has been probably more nonsense written by writers of fiction—let alone the poets, notorious high-priests of the imposture—upon the subject of ante-nuptial love, than upon all others put together. 'Falling in love,' 'love at first sight,' and similar phrases, which might just as well be applied to a bunch of grapes or a bottle of beer, as to a young gentleman or lady, are invested with mysterious and

almost divine attributes ; while the Beloved Object upon whom the other's eyes have only once been set perhaps, is made to push from their places in the male or female heart its tried and dearest friends. We deeply sympathise with Mr. Charles Lamb in this matter, and believe the grievance to be of the most outrageous character. We wonder whether, in the neighbourhood of the Salt Lake, the same change comes over the male Mormon previous to each 'annexation' of a wife, or whether it is an evil peculiar to monogamists. When a couple have been married a little time, it is reasonable enough, indeed, that the wife—who has become partner, lover, sympathiser, house-manager, companion, guide (but rarely philosopher), and friend, in one—should fill the foremost and highest place in the thoughts and affections of the husband; but when in the untried and chrysalis state of 'engaged young woman,' we do think it a very poor return for years of trustful intercourse that we should be so easily and quickly distanced by her in the affections of our friend. The pair cannot possibly know enough about one another to warrant anything of the sort; the lady especially—and rather luckily for some of us men—being quite unable to make inquiry into 'dearest Robert's' antecedents. Indeed, persons alter so much when bearing the matrimonial yoke together, from what they were when going in single harness, that antecedents are of no great consequence; and herein lay Florence's hope of the Marsdens' well-being.

They took a fine house in town, which their

fortune justified them in doing, and kept a couple of carriages, which it did not. Mr. Onslow Bateman had lodgings of his own, and did not live with them, but he was their welcome and constant guest. His daughter was always pleased to see her father the most polished ornament of their brilliant little assemblies; while Marsden, who grew more and more closely connected with him in business matters, was always glad to hear from his smoothly prophesying lips how the *Vampire* was sucking at that *vile corpus*—on which so many such experiments are made—the Public. His acquaintance lay principally among the contributors of that paper—disciples of the great Pooh-pooh School—who hailed the accession to their ranks of one so full of strange adventure and unconventional ideas. The conversation of these gentlemen was brilliant and bitter; that of Mr. Onslow Bateman was graceful and polite; that of Robert Marsden vivacious and outspoken. Ellen imagined that she was entertaining the most charming company in London. When Sir Charles and Lady Ryder came to stay with them after the double marriage, the younger sister had promised to herself some little triumphant pleasure in showing Florence that although she herself had no pretensions to cleverness, she at least could offer her society in Belgrave Street such as was worthy of the authoress of *Anne Chisholm*. This proposed gratification did not, however, come off as she expected. If the company had had amongst them but one poor half-pennyworth of enthusiasm in favour of any one thing, Florence might have got on

with them well enough, for she could be pyrotechnical and witty herself when she felt at ease, besides being beautiful enough to attract a whole tribe of young philosophers. But want of earnestness is in the eyes of an earnest-hearted young woman the unforgivable sin; she would almost rather have you laugh at *her* than at her pet theories. Florence thought the men she met at the Marsdens a mere gibing, godless set of Merry-Andrews, and expressed as much to her husband when they retired together on the night of poor Ellen's first reception.

'Now don't you think so, Charles?' she added coaxingly; for she valued her husband's opinion upon all subjects, and would always rather have had it upon her side than an act of parliament.

'Really, my dear,' replied he laughing, 'your intuition is so much better than most people's experience, or I should have said that we had hardly seen enough of'—

Here she managed to stop his mouth with her rose-leaf of a hand, and interrupted him coaxingly, with: 'You don't like them *yourself* now, Charley, dear? Come, tell me.'

'No, I do not, my love,' returned her husband seriously.

Whereupon Florence kissed him approvingly.

They were a happy pair, those two, and understood and appreciated one another thoroughly. It is a mere wicked bachelor-scandal to say that they must have quarrelled now and then like other married folks. They never did anything of the sort. What is the use of any quarrel whose termination is

certain beforehand—predestinated? Sir Charles Ryder, although he had a literary wife, was undisputed master in his own household. Even when the children came—who should ever climb around the parent stems, and entwine them together in new bonds of love, but who sometimes have a separating tendency—there were no disputes, no favouritisms. Rudesleigh was indeed a happy home.

The Marsdens—it was afterwards said ‘luckily’—had no offspring, who—although such a bond was not necessary to attach Ellen to her husband—might otherwise have done much to domesticate Robert. There is no man commonly more devoted to his young children than the harem-scarem, wild-oats-sowing father, who has once been tamed. Marsden felt no want of them, as a man may not feel the want of a remedy without which he will nevertheless die; nor was he indeed, as it was, what could be called, with any charity, a bad husband. If there be three classes of husbands, as of everything else—the good, the bad, and the indifferent—he rather, in the eyes of the world, belonged to the last class, while in his wife’s eyes, which was, after all, the more important matter, he still belonged to the first. It is our private belief, too, that he would have always remained so, so long as the barometer of his fortunes stood at ‘Fair.’ One morning, however, several years after their marriage, an incident occurred which brought down the index-hand at once to ‘Very Stormy.’ A cheque of his for a considerable sum was dishonoured. Marsden was very unacquainted with business matters, and

did not know the full and direful meaning of this occurrence. His fortune—much reduced from its original value in Spanish doubloons, by the time he had got to England—was still large, as he believed, and had been invested by his father-in-law in different safe concerns; but Mr. Onslow Bateman had the power of using his name in connection with the *Vampire* to a quite unlimited extent. He himself had, without knowing it, overdrawn his account largely at the banker's; and his father-in-law, without telling it, had involved him to a fearful amount with the newspaper. Mr. Onslow Bateman did not mean to act dishonestly, but he had not had the courage to confess the continuous and total failure of the speculation of which he had so often boasted, and out of which besides, he himself, as manager, made a comfortable income. For years the *Vampire* had been kept alive solely by Robert Marsden's credit. Robert's banker knew it, his friends knew it, his enemies knew it well, but the young man himself only knew that, from time to time, a little more effort had had to be made, and a little more money been required—after each of which galvanic shocks he had been assured that the *Vampire* had been resuscitated, and was again doing well. In total ignorance of the extent of his calamity, but not without suspicion of the cause of it, he took his way to the lodgings of Mr. Onslow Bateman in Half-moon Street. That gentleman was in the back drawing-room, which had been fitted up as his study, with newspapers about him enough to have covered him knee-deep, arranged



neatly in solid piles, and with business-looking documents and letters, docketed or under weights, in heaps upon the table, as though the whole place had been sacred to Method, while Mr. Bateman himself might have sat for a very respectable allegory of Commercial Security.

‘Look here,’ exclaimed Marsden sternly, as he threw down the dishonoured cheque, ‘will you, who are such an excellent man of business, tell me how much *that* is worth?’

‘Four hundred and fifteen pounds,’ replied Mr. Bateman quietly, but turning exceedingly pale nevertheless. ‘I am sorry you are drawing so much out of the Bank at present, for we were just now wanting a little, and I did not wish to touch your investments.’

‘You need not disturb yourself on that account, sir,’ observed Marsden bitterly; ‘that cheque is dishonoured.’

‘Dishonoured, is it?’ said his father-in-law, raising his eyebrows, as if that were a curious and interesting circumstance too. ‘There must be some mistake; we will see to that this afternoon.’

‘At once, if you please, Mr. Bateman: without one moment’s delay. I have deferred long enough to look after my own affairs, it seems.’

‘My dear Marsden,’ returned the other reproachfully, ‘*you* must know how much you have in your banker’s hands. I could not have drawn out money without your consent. You have given me several cheques lately.’

‘I know I have,’ remarked Marsden impatiently; ‘I have given you a great deal too many.’

you are in your present state of mind ; it is quite impossible. Matters of business are not to be settled in a moment. No, sir, I will not.'

'Then, Mr. Onslow Bateman, I will fetch some one here who will make you do so.'

Robert Marsden left the room as he said those words, and Mr. Bateman's ghastly smile and show of incredulity were thrown away upon the looking-glass opposite to him. They looked so very unlike the things he had intended them to be—what was reflected there was altogether so different from the cautious and agreeable features which it generally mirrored—that he got up as if to look into the metamorphosis. He walked with difficulty, and before he had crossed the room, a knock at the door sent him staggering back to his writing-chair. The headstrong, foolish lad would surely never have come back with a—with a policeman! No. He would in that case scarcely have knocked. It was only a message-boy from the *Vampire* office, with a note marked *private*, and very carefully sealed. Mr. Onslow Bateman opened it, read it, and bade the servant say that there was no answer. It consisted of only a single line, but he seemed either to be unable to make himself master of its meaning, or to be paralysed by the intelligence it conveyed: 'R. has gone to Belgrave St.' That was all. He sat and stared at it, as though he expected some chemical writing of a more assuring character would presently make itself apparent. Then, leaning his head on his right hand, which shut out the door from his vision, he sat at his desk, motionless, wait-

ing for the house-bell to ring again. At last it did ring, and he heard Marsden's voice in the passage speaking hoarsely. He also recognised another foot-fall on the stairs, at which his white face grew more ghastly still. The room-door was opened, and admitted those two persons; he did not look up at them, but shaded his eyes with his delicate white fingers as before.

'Do not go near that man, if you wish to call me husband!' exclaimed Marsden sternly, and laying his hand upon his wife's arm. 'He has made beggars of you and me. I went for you, that you, his daughter, should entreat him to tell you to what extent he had been robbing his own flesh and blood. I now bring you to look upon him for the last time, for you must make your choice henceforth between him and me. When I reached home, sir, I found your printer, Richards, who, having been fobbed off long enough by your repeated promises, by your specious falsehoods of what I would do for you and for this precious property, declined to trust me any more. To trust *me*, mark you, who never knew I owed him sixpence. You must have been a clever rogue—be silent, woman, I tell you there is no greater swindler than yon fellow alive!—a clever plausible rogue to get much credit from a man like that. He would put *me* into prison to-morrow, look you! Seven-and-thirty thousand pounds or so, is, it seems, the account for which I am made liable. Three years of rather costly journalism, even though this Richards did, as he says, pay for everything upon the speculation of your having so weak and wealthy

a son-in-law—you have now small reason to boast any more of *that*, I reckon. Certainly costly, I repeat, since this debt is independent of my pretty frequent bleedings at your persuasive hands. You need not trouble yourself to finish that article, sir, for the paper is dead. It is a pity, for I do not doubt there is an exceedingly high moral tone in it. I believe we have now—this lady, your daughter, and myself—when all shall be paid, about one thousand pounds to live upon. Shall I advance anything more to you for some other highly promising venture? Pray, command me, sir, to the extent of my humble means. You do not speak; and certainly silence becomes you best, Mr. Bateman. Have you any last words, Ellen, to address to this man? I have quite finished with him.’

‘Father,’ exclaimed Mrs. Marsden tremulously; ‘you see I have no choice in this matter. I have sworn to cleave to Robert and forsake all others for his sake. I do not understand the nature of the wrong you have done him, and I do not wish to do so. If we had been a little more open to one another, father, if you would have suffered Florence and myself to have been nearer to you when we were girls—I do not now say it, Heaven knows, in the way of reproach—I think this dreadful misfortune would not, could not, have happened to us. I telegraphed to dearest Florence before I left home, and she will be here to-morrow, at latest, to cheer you, to comfort you, as she only can. I would gladly do so myself—for Robert would permit me, yet, for all he has said—but I never had the power, never.

Will you kiss me, father?' She advanced a step or two towards him, but presently ran back to her husband screaming: 'Look, Robert, look in the glass yonder! Papa is dying! O horror—my father is dead!'

And indeed it was even as she said.

Sitting at his desk, with one hand supporting his head, and the other within his waistcoat, pressed against his heart, as if some dreadful pang had called it thither, Mr. Onslow Bateman had expired, though at what point of that dread interview it was now impossible to say.

Sir Charles and Lady Ryder arrived in Belgrave Street as fast as steam and horse-power could bring them; and the baronet attended Mr. Onslow Bateman's funeral as chief mourner. Marsden could by no means be induced to be present, or even to wear so much as a hat-band in respect for the departed. The dead man had left behind him no other enemy—for he had never spoken ill (whatever he might have written) of any creature—and a considerable number of persons, who would certainly 'miss' him in a sense quite equal to the conventional meaning of the expression, followed him to the grave. His two daughters, whom he had wronged most deeply, sat at home weeping bitterly for him from whom they had at least never experienced a harshness. Florence named her second boy after him, and ever held his memory dear and in tenderness.

There were other matters affecting the Marsdens just then more pressingly than the dead. There was indeed now nothing beyond the thousand pounds

which Robert had calculated upon left out of all that treasure from the banks of the Magdalena. If it had not been for Ryder, poverty would have come upon him in bitterest guise, for Marsden was growing reckless, and something more than cold to his poor wife at home. The young baronet, who took little interest in politics, but whose support was of some value to the member for his division of the county, applied to him for a situation for his friend. Government-post he had none to give him, but there was a certain actuaryship procured through his good offices for the ruined man, Sir Charles becoming Marsden's security to the extent of two thousand pounds. The income was a very fair one, and for some time its recipient evinced a proportionable change for the better, for Robert Marsden's respectability ever fluctuated directly as his revenue. Of course, the house in Belgrave Street and the two carriages were no longer possible; but a very 'desirable residence' was procured elsewhere; the little dinner-parties were resumed, and matters were managed generally in a fashion which was something more than comfortable. After a little, even this was not sufficient: Marsden seemed unable to separate himself from his recent position, and began to fill his brother-in-law's mind with much misgiving. The baronet, upon becoming his security, had protected poor Ellen as well as he could, by compelling Marsden to insure his life for her benefit to the extent of five thousand pounds; and he could not forbear, on one occasion—when speaking of the premium yearly due upon the sum in question—from

remonstrating with him upon his profuse expenditure.

‘My dear Marsden,’ observed he good-naturedly, when he was staying alone a couple of days with the actuary and his wife, in town, ‘you must either be an excellent manager, or else a very extravagant fellow, for I never saw six hundred a year go half so far.’

‘My dear sir,’ returned the other gravely, ‘I am quite aware that I am under considerable obligations to you; but unless I request you to lend me money, you have no sort of right to inquire into my private concerns.’ And he presently left the room in something of a huff.

Mrs. Marsden, whose custom it by no means was to speak upon business matters, then looked up with tearful eyes from the book which she had been pretending to read by the fireside, and said: ‘Indeed, Sir Charles, there is something very wrong in our affairs, I know, for my dear husband is so changed.’

‘I hope not—I sincerely trust not, Mrs. Marsden; but “if any misfortune should ever chance to happen, remember”—these were Florence’s last words to me ere I left home—“tell my dearest sister to come down to Rudesleigh at once, and stop there.”’

‘Why, what do you fear that should separate Robert and me?’ cried Ellen with agitation. ‘What *have* you heard about us?’

‘Nothing, my dear Mrs. Marsden; I have heard nothing; but when I see with my own eyes a man living at five times the rate justified by his income, I am sure the end cannot be very far off.’

‘And yet, do you know,’ said she, dropping her voice to a whisper, ‘that we pay ready money for almost everything?’

‘Indeed, I did not,’ replied the baronet drily; ‘and if so, I do not wonder at Marsden’s considering my interference an impertinence.’ And as he looked upon the yet young wife’s flushed cheeks and down-cast eyes, he groaned to think that a creature once so guileless, should have so soon been taught to tell so obvious and audacious a lie.

It was but a short time after this that Marsden left town for several days without telling Ellen whither he was going. He had never done such a thing before, and it pained her deeply, as the coldest, most unhusbandlike action of his married life; she had but few female friends in London, and was always lonely in his absence, with nothing to cheer her—as she had often told him, too—but the picturing to herself what her dear Robert was doing when away. He himself seemed, by a certain alteration in his behaviour, when he returned, to feel that he had behaved cruelly, so that she took courage to ask him—having heard from her maid, who had heard it from his valet, where he had been—what had taken him to Westmoreland. He did not answer, but looked into her face with what he meant to have been a cold indifference, but which changed into an expression of penitent anguish, that in after-years she never forgot. ‘Are, then, the places where you knew me first still dear to you, Robert? I know you went to see them on your road to Rudesleigh, when you came home; but now—I had almost



thought, dear Robert, that you cared neither for them nor me.' Her tears fell fast as he kissed her forehead with lips as cold as a stone.

'I told you once, Ellen, I was not worthy of you, and I told you the truth. Never shed tear for me *now*, girl, nor henceforth, I do beseech you; for it would be far better for you that I were dead than alive.'

The miserable hours the poor girl spent that night were nothing to the horrors of the morning, when she learned in his own handwriting that Robert Marsden had left her for ever, an exile and an outlaw. He had taken advantage of his situation as actuary to falsify the accounts of his employers, and so secure for himself many thousand pounds. Felon as he was, he knew she would not have ceased from seeking him, had he not added that he did not wish to behold her face again; that she was to think of him as dead, and to be thankful.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

## THE REST OF THE HOUSEHOLD.

MRS. MARSDEN was received in her great grief at Rudesleigh Manor with sympathising affection and reverent tenderness. Even her old enemy, little Miss Ryder—whose home was at the manor-house now no less than it had been when Sir Charles was a bachelor—softened towards the worse than widowed young woman, and endeavoured to initiate her into the mysteries of her favourite pursuit of knitting, as being one of the most excellent specifics for an inward bruise, or heart-sorrow. Her misfortune was so infinitely more dire than anything which could possibly have been foreseen, that no sort of comfort could be offered except that wretched one of matters being now at their very worst. Ryder indeed thought no disgrace ought to be weighed against the advantage of Ellen's being freed for ever from the life-companionship of such a scoundrel as Robert had proved to be. He paid his surety-money for him without a murmur, and would have paid—if by that means he could have wiped out the stain that clung to the poor wife—the enormous losses incurred by his wholesale falsifications as well ; but that was impossible, since Robert Marsden's name was already in the *Hue and Cry*, with the promise of a reward for his appre-

hension, and Robert Marsden's delinquencies the subject of conversation from drawing-room to street-corner. But what Ryder was most enraged about against his brother-in-law was the fact, that the policy for five thousand pounds was missing, which he had compelled him to procure for the sake of his wife. His failing to leave that document was, in the baronet's eyes, a more base and scoundrel-like action than all the rest, and he had secretly determined that in case of Marsden's arrest, he would not advance a single shilling for his legal defence until that deed was placed in his own possession.

There seemed, however, but little probability of any such opportunity occurring, since after many months' careful search, the police found themselves totally at fault, and gave up the pursuit of the offender, notwithstanding that the large sums he was supposed to have carried away with him whetted their curiosity not a little. One enthusiastic detective absolutely paid a visit to Marycross, and dug perseveringly for nuggets—and information—for a fortnight; and another, as we have heard, lived for several weeks in a patent tent, by the trunk of a Tamarind-tree that lay on the right bank of the Magdalena River. Ellen could never be induced, as some of her friends entreated her, to resume her maiden name; but she became more like what one might imagine Miss Ryder to have been in her youth—after the 'disappointment,' at which she sometimes hinted—than would be thought possible. Her impetuous spirits were gone, indeed, for ever, and her beauty, without departing, seemed to have

altogether changed its character, but she was cheerful and even chatty upon all subjects save the one she thought of most; and when great Aunt Ryder was exhausted with carrying her little nephews pick-a-back, Aunt Ellen was always willing to become a 'gee-gee' or riding-horse in her place, although certainly one of no very prancing and fiery temperament.

Notwithstanding that so many female relatives are living together at Rudesleigh, years have now rolled on without sign of anything approaching to a disagreement. The two sisters love one another as dearly as they ever did when we knew them at Teesdale How. The Bateman Household proper is indeed narrowed in its limits, but the Ryder branch of it continues to increase with periodical punctuality. Where love and good sense dwell together, matters are sure to go on pretty smoothly, and there is seldom much for the poor tale-writer to glean in such a field. An incident, however, in addition to the customary appearance of another little Ryder, happened within this last twelvemonth, which, having a decided bearing upon our story, may fitly conclude it.

The two sons of the same county member through whose influence Marsden had obtained his actuaryship chanced to be staying at Rudesleigh Manor, with their friend, the eldest—but still not very old—Master Ryder. They went to a school in Leicestershire, a long way off, and therefore possessed a vast superiority in the eyes of that young gentleman, who

Forester, however, took a very pallid and unhealthy hue, for so persevering a pursuer of the delights of the chase, when his eyes met those of the visitor. He left the horse with his groom, and came forward out of earshot of the rest to meet him.

‘Are you come down here to send me to the hulks?’ inquired Robert Marsden hoarsely.

‘That depends upon yourself, sir,’ returned Ryder sternly, but far from bitterly. ‘As I am a living man, I will do so, unless I get that policy of yours for five thousand pounds. I do not let you out of sight until I hold it in my hands.’

He followed Marsden into the dwelling-house, and upstairs, where he again got sight of the woman’s face, which he seemed to remember dimly to have seen elsewhere. The policy was handed over to him.

‘Have you paid the premiums up to this date, sir? Good. Since it cannot hurt you to do so in this world, and must needs benefit you, as at least one act of justice done, in that which is to come, will you leave written directions that proof of your demise, when that shall take place, may be forwarded to’—he could not bring himself to mention Ellen’s name—‘to Rudesleigh?’

‘I will,’ said Marsden solemnly.

As there had been no greeting when they met, so there was no God-be-with-you when they parted. So far sundered were those two ‘that had been friends in youth.’

The woman’s face haunted Ryder’s memory throughout his return journey, and while he was

telling Florence how he had sped upon his strange errand.

‘Was she rather ruddy and stout?’ inquired she.

‘Yes. But how did you know that? I would give five pounds to recollect that woman’s name.’

‘I only guess,’ replied Florence sadly. ‘I never could understand why Marsden retained such an attachment to Westmoreland. But, if she be Phoebe Rosthwaite, now I can.’

‘Yes, Phoebe; that is she without doubt,’ exclaimed Ryder: ‘but we must never tell poor Ellen this.’

‘Never,’ replied Florence—‘never, husband; for that would be harder for her to bear than all the rest.’

THE END.

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